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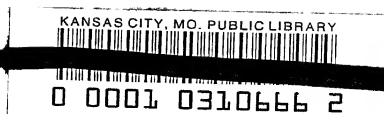
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*Jacob*

BOOKS BY IRVING FINEMAN

THIS PURE YOUNG MAN

LOVERS MUST LEARN

HEAR, YE SONS  
(*Modern Library Edition*)

DOCTOR ADDAMS

I R V I N G F I N E M A N .

# Jacob

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOVEL

*And he came to his father,*

*and said, My Father.*

*And he said, Here am I;*

*who art thou, my son?*

—GENESIS



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*Jacob*



*To My Son, Joseph:*

YOU WERE born in the early morning of a rainy day in the autumn; on a Thursday. Since the week before, Rachel, your mother, had begun several times to labor; but each start had proved false.

On Tuesday I was sent for to attend to a matter of business in a town some distance away. It would mean my being gone overnight and I was loath to leave Rachel and risk missing your coming.

But you would be days yet, said the ones wise in such matters; and your mother, suffering patiently among them, said to me, smiling wanly, "You know that Becky will not come so long as you wait for her."

It was one of her womanly superstitions that there is a perversity in events; that you have to fool destiny; and that you can trick fate by tempting this perversity. For that reason, and because in her heart she dearly wished to bear me a son, all during the pregnancy she insisted on your being a girl to be named after my mother, Rebekah.

I was foolish enough to try to point out to her that, con-

trary to her own belief, she had tempted fate from the very first month when she had been busily making numberless garments—those stacks of diapers, of tiny shirts, of blankets and bedding, all prepared for a creature not yet in sight.

Her look was scornful. "But I knew there was going to be a baby." She spoke with a new tone of indisputable authority which seemed to have come with pregnancy. "What sex it will be or just when it comes is another matter. Go on, Jacob. Your going will hasten its coming. Anyway, you are only delaying matters with such talk."

Well, I took her advice. I rose early on Wednesday morning. I kissed her as she lay in bed, helpless under that great, incredible mound you had raised on her beautiful body, and rode off.

It was a fine fall day, mild and golden. Heaven and earth and the rising sun sang the proud pleasant pæan in my heart. In the town, feeling invincible, I made excellent deals; and in one of the shops toward evening I bought your mother some gifts—an old silver brooch of exquisite workmanship and a bag of polished alligator, which seemed to me grotesque, but which she had once expressed a wish to have. Then I went to bed at the inn, intending to finish my business the next day.

But I was wakened from sound sleep. It was still night and someone stood by my bed with a light.

"Your wife is in great labor. She is calling for you."

I sprang from bed and dressed, stumbling and funbling in my haste, and rode away through pitch blackness and falling rain. I rode fast; not proudly now, but anxious.

Thunder rolled in the hills and lightning flashed in the endlessly long and winding, flooded roads. Grey dawning light slowly suffused the heavens and the heavy downpour



of thick grey rain, but neither sky nor earth were visible. I rode for hours as if swimming through stormy seas, remembering how I swam with Rachel in the sunny sea the day you were conceived. . . .

Then too I had to be away from home; but it was winter, and your mother, who, before you came, was ever eager for diversion and a chance to share my interests, when she heard I would be going down to the warm sea islands had pleaded to go with me, despite the dangers and inconveniences of life in such outlandish places. I took her with me.

That day, then, being fine, I said I would take her to a place I knew along the shore of the island we were on, an unfrequented spot where we might bathe in the sea. Rachel had gathered a savory lunch—she was ever pleased with an occasion to prepare good food—and we were just setting out when a message came, this time with news not of birth but of death.

My mother, Rebekah, had died.

Rachel held me, comforting me as I wept, and I remembered then in my grief my father, Isaac, telling how Rebekah, his wife, had comforted him for the death of his mother, Sarah.

I pressed my head against Rachel's breast and cried like a child, though my cries were the harsh, hoarse cries of a man; for the thought of my mother's face still and cold, and her body stiff in death was terrible to me. In my peaceable life I had avoided and seen little of human death, which was dreadful to me. I could not accept the death of my mother; although in the excitement and happiness of my life with Rachel I had thought little of her, had indeed forgotten my mother as she said I would when I left her.

Now, like a child, I shut my eyes in remorse and dread against Rachel's warm bosom and found comfort there. But when my anguish had subsided I stood up saying, "We must go now."

"Where?" said Rachel.

"To Canaan, to my father's house in Beersheba."

"But," said Rachel, "she will be gone, Jacob; she will have been buried long before you get there." And I saw that Rachel, practical, as ever women are, was right; and I was relieved that I would not have to look upon my mother's dead face nor see her put away into the cold earth, but would always remember her as I had seen her last, with the light of her love for me shining in her quick dark eyes, and those quick slender hands, which had so often prepared my food and so patiently sewn and mended my clothing, waving me farewell when I left home. . . .

Rachel picked up the basket of food. "Let us go on, Jacob. The sea will do you good." And she held to my hand as we went through thick green woods to the curving strip of white beach I knew. And there, shut away from the world, we undressed and went hand in hand like our first parents, Adam and Eve, before they ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil and learned sin and shame. Together we descended the smooth warm sloping sands and swam in the clear green-blue salt water that washed the tears from my eyes.

The crystalline sea teemed with many colored fish. They brushed our feet. Shoals of them flew out of the rolling waves and sped across the troughs into the sides of other waves.

We swam until we were weary; then side by side we basked on the beach in the hot sun, Rachel's fair body be-

side my brown one under the wide bright blue sky. And I remembered the playful days of my childhood.

"When we were children, Esau and I, my mother would tell us . . ." Recalling the sweetness of my mother's love, the hot tears welled up to my eyes again and I turned and fell to weeping on the sand until Rachel drew me again into the sea, rippling and sparkling under the warm wind and the sunshine, and played with me until I was comforted again.

Then we were hungry and, sitting on sun-warmed rocks, we ate the good food she had prepared and drank the good wine I had brought, and rested replete on the edge of the sea-washed sand. . . .

"And once when I hurt my hand she said . . ." I could not refrain from speaking now and again of the mother I had loved, who had loved me beyond all others, more than my brother, more even than my father. And because she wished to draw the painful memories from my mind and heart Rachel held me closer in her arms, and, as the anguish for my lost mother ebbed away, desire for Rachel, my wife, whom I loved now beyond all other beings on this earth, rose in me stronger than ever it had been; and perhaps because the fear of death was in our minds, and life that fine day was so sweet to us, we denied death with all our passion as we lay there embraced like the thoughtless creatures of nature—of land and sea, lying together there on the edge of the forest-encircled beach with the teeming salt water washing in waves upon us. . . .

Then we slept.

And it was not more than a fortnight after our return home that Rachel told me with delight of the sign that she had conceived at last. "It was the mandrakes I have been eating," she said.

"What mandrakes?" I asked. "I saw no mandrakes down there on the island."

"Oh, no, not there," she said. "These were some roots I got from my sister Leah before we went away. Don't you remember?" Then I recalled how Leah had come to me one night saying it was with Rachel's permission, and saying something about having hired me with some mandrakes her son Reuben had found—something I had paid no attention to at the time, being ever averse to involvement in the business or controversies of women.

I smiled at Rachel's notion. "If it is true, Rachel, if you are really pregnant, I should be inclined to think—and I advance the idea most tentatively—that if any new element were responsible, the presence of salt water at conception might possibly have something to do with it."

To my surprise she blushed at the memory I had evoked. She laughed uncomfortably and said, "Don't be absurd."

"But why absurd?" I insisted. "It is generally believed that all life had its beginnings in the sea—the sequence of creation, even in the oldest stories, being: first fish, then fowl, then beast, then man; hence it seems to me not illogical to guess that the salt water may possibly have supplied some element for conception which we had theretofore lacked." I was careful not to say "you theretofore lacked," although the children I had had with Leah and other women were clear enough evidence that the lack had not been in myself.

But Rachel, womanlike, was not impressed by my logic. "Logic never conceived a child," said your mother quite illogically, but with that new air of authority which pregnancy seemed to have given her, and which she thereafter maintained. "And everyone knows that mandrakes are the best remedy for barrenness."

"But why mandrakes? Why not radishes?" I insisted, for I am a lover of logic.

"Why must you always have a reason? It is enough for me to know that it is so." Then she came and gave me a hug and a kiss which put an end to that discussion.

Nor was she impressed by the results of some experiments I later made, using salt water in connection with the breeding of her father's sheep, a matter in which I was then very much interested. When I reported to her, with elation, my discovery that salt water seemed to be increasing the fertility of the sheep while no amount of mandrakes had made any difference, all Rachel said was, "Men are not rams, nor are women ewes." A statement true enough in itself, and which was just enough, though barely, to the point to make it impossible for me to insist on my opinion, especially in consideration of the fact of her indisputable pregnancy, which had, of course, made me very happy—and indulgent. For it seems pretty well agreed that a pregnant woman should be indulged; though just exactly why I have never been able to learn.

Be that as it may, and whether it was as a consequence of those mysterious mandrakes or the teeming salt sea, you, my son, were being born then as I rode anxiously home through a pouring rain that autumn day. For when at long last I arrived you were already born; just born. Still streaked with your mother's blood and the slimy greenish serum, you were being held up like a rabbit and slapped. On your tiny face, remarkable even at birth for its beautiful resemblance to Rachel, was that bland, blank, death-like look, that look of aloneness of the newly born.

But with a lusty cry you woke to life and voiced your indignation and discomfort, your first sense of insecurity

in this new world; and then celebrated your release from the warm dark peace of the old one, or expressed perhaps your first attitude toward the bright cold excitement of the new by ejecting upon it a pale golden stream, a brief bright arc out of your being. With anxiety and wonder I looked at your limbs, at your tiny hands, fingers and fingernails, loins, toes and ears, relieved to find them whole and right.

I hastened to your mother where she lay exhausted, deathly pale and still bleeding. In your eagerness, or more likely—since men are so greatly possessed with the desire to return to the wombs of women—in your reluctance to leave her sweet body you had torn the portal. Rachel opened her eyes when I took her hand; she smiled and said, “You see? I was right. It is a boy. And as soon as you went away he started to come.”

“Yes,” I said, “it is just as you said.”

“We will call him Joseph,” she murmured, “which means, ‘He shall add’; and I’ll have another.”

“Yes,” I said, and kissed her, amazed at frail woman’s passion for fertility. In my dread of what she must have suffered I was prepared to swear she need not have to go through it again. But still holding my hand, she fell contentedly asleep.

It was astonishing to see the flatness of her belly.

*...Two nations are in thy womb...*

N O MAN yet knows what it is like to be born. No man can speak with certainty of the day of his birth.

But in the birth of his son each man approaches the knowledge of his own birth; and in telling his son of the birth he has witnessed he can augment, perhaps, that knowledge which his son will approach when he comes to witness the birth of his own son.

And I am a lover of knowledge. Therefore I have told you how you were born.

Of my own birth I can tell you, of course, only what has been told to me. Like your mother Rachel, my mother Rebekah had long been barren. And it would appear, from all accounts, that men do not as easily beget children with the women they love as with those they go to only with lust. My doughty grandfather, Abraham, begot Ishmael by Hagar apparently without any trouble, but it took the intercession of the Lord himself, if the story they still tell is to be believed, to bring Sarah, his beloved wife, to pregnancy with Isaac, my father, so late indeed in Sarah's life that she laughed at the very idea.

I myself had six sons and a daughter by Leah, and two sons by Bilhah, and two sons by Zilpah, all easily conceived, before your mother, whom alone of all women on this earth I truly loved, conceived you, with, as I have told you she thought, the aid of those mandrakes. And I once heard my father say how long and fervently he had prayed God to make my mother fruitful, before she gave birth to me and my brother Esau. And my father, I know, was as devoted to Rebekah, my mother, as he had been to his beloved mother, Sarah, before she died.

It may well be that a love which inflames the spirit works some ill effect in the process of propagation - at least at first. For I have observed that, in many cases, when that first spiritual flame of love has subsided conception appears to be less difficult—it is then apt indeed, in some cases, to occur more frequently than is desired. It would seem therefore that, for the purposes of breeding, this thing we call love between men and women is no advantage, that it may indeed be a drawback; one with which only mankind is afflicted. For in all my breeding of sheep I have seen no sign of its like, only animal lust. So if it is your wish to multiply your kind on this earth it may be wise to eschew love, to go to women only with lust, like the beasts. Yet it would ill become me to advise you not to seek out a woman you can truly love, as I did your mother. How I found and won her I shall tell you in due course, but first let me return to the beginning of my story.

My mother said that even in the womb my twin brother and I fought so that she had not a moment's peace in the last months of her pregnancy. It was a marvel, she said, that Esau had not destroyed me in our prenatal struggles there in her womb, he was so much the bigger and stronger even at birth; but I must have been agile in defense and



quick-witted even then, able to elude him; and when he emerged in a violent spasm, I came out after him, quietly holding to his heel.

Not very long after your birth, my son, it was apparent that you had happily taken traits from both your parents—from your mother her radiant beauty and cheerful disposition, her fair hair and deep blue eyes, her smile; and from me a quick restless mind, inexhaustible curiosity, a well-shaped head, and sensitive hands.

With my brother and me it was as if we had decided not to combine the same characteristics of our parents but had divided them between us, as if each had chosen for himself the principal characteristic of one parent and enhanced it by something from the other: He took my strong father's physique, and added my mother's quickness of movement; I took my mother's spirit, and added my father's love of words. My mother said that from the beginning Esau was robust, ruddy, shaggy-haired, rude, quick-tempered, active and violent. I was quiet, small-boned, fair-skinned, with fine silky curls, gentle, thoughtful, but quick-witted and observant.

From watching your infant development I have since seen how early the child reveals its own essential nature. And I think now it is important that a man have a child whose early life he can observe closely, for thus only can he make whole his knowledge of life's experience. Since he has no recollection of the earliest years of his own existence he can get some knowledge of the nature of that part of man's life by observing it in his child.

Because they were not conceived in love I had not been interested enough to observe closely the children I begot with other women before your beloved mother conceived you. But you fascinated and endlessly entertained me from

the very first day, when as a red-faced homunculus with your hair still matted with blood and serum from the womb it was incredible to see you smile in your sleep; and even to hear your infant crying, which was at once the anguished expression of your discomfort in this strange world and an exercise which fortified you against that world; stirring the red blood into every cranny of your small body as you flailed your little arms and legs convulsively, flexing them; and strengthening your thighs and shoulders so that in less than two months you developed into an admirable mannikin.

Though still toothless, though the last of the primal fuzz was just coming off the skin of your shoulders, your wandering hands, so small but so beautifully formed, so sweetly dimpled, were restless, exploring whatever came within reach, especially yourself, from those curiously contrived loins to your well-shaped head, both large out of all proportion to the rest of you, and which between them, will make most of the joy and the trouble of your life. Endlessly diverting it was to watch your blue eyes, now smiling, now intently curious, now filled with tears of displeasure, of anger at being kept waiting, whether hungry, or wet, or besmirched with your own golden excrement.

And during your incontinent outbursts I would think with envy: What a pity that as we grow older we learn not to cry out our needs, our importunate desires, and our sufferings, our wish that what is wrong may be righted! It seemed then a pity that we come to learn a craven patience instead of maintaining this righteous and frank indignation which is unendurable to the hearer. No being could long withstand the wild impatience of your need, your hungry whimper bursting into red-faced,

wide-mouthed, howling wrath. No one could long withhold your grasping at the full sweet breast which you clutched, sucking away ravenously like a little monster, while your tearful eyes spoke your deep resentment at having been made to suffer.

But soon you would be appeased; the tear-clotted curling golden lashes drooped and, the small mouth still sucking, the small hand still grasping, you fell into sweet satisfied slumber while your mother whispered and crooned to you. Then as you lay sleeping, so rosy pink and still with arms upraised like wings, we would see how your fingers were tapered like mine, and how the first hair on your head, dark like mine, was giving way to the new crop of silvery gold like your mother's, which with your bright dark-blue eyes and fine fair skin made you look so miraculously like her, although you showed clearly from the very beginning the traits you had got from me.

*...Now Isaac loved Esau, because he  
did eat of his venison: and Rebekah  
loved Jacob...*

PARENTS may love their children for any of many reasons.

Generally speaking, I should say that, while men can and do find reasons for everything—even for loving—women need no reasons for anything they do.

But it is understandable that in no small part you love your child because you see yourself reflected in that child, and because you see there your beloved mate. The former is apt, of course, to be the stronger element since love of oneself is naturally unfailing, while love of one's mate is apt to suffer somewhat in time. The reasons for that I shall doubtless come to later in this tale.

What I am thinking of now is the difference between the love we, Rachel and I, had for you, Joseph, and that of my parents for Esau and me. Rachel and I each loved you doubly because each of us could so clearly see in you himself and the beloved other. When I would come to watch you taken, pink and milk-white, from the bath, I always remarked how completely you resembled Rachel.

I could see nothing of myself in your face. "But," she would say, "see how beautifully shaped his head is, like yours, with that same bulge in the back; and see how observant his eyes are, just like yours." And then, together, we would look into the blue pools of your clearly inquisitive, unblinking eyes, intent under comically knitted brows and wrinkled forehead, as if you were engraving us in one image on your fresh, blank little mind. In you we knew we were joined.

But ever since the day in my own childhood when I became aware of my mother and father as separate beings I knew that my brother and I were not alike, not only in their eyes but in their hearts. As soon as I had grown to see my mother not merely as a warm, sheltering, womb-like creature enveloping me in her kindness, but as Rebekah, small-boned and dark-eyed, whom I strongly resembled, I knew she preferred me to Esau; and Isaac, my father, though he loved me, too, as he still loved my mother, could ill conceal how much he favored Esau who was so completely and perfectly that part of himself which he preferred. For my father, a tall, strong, broad-backed man, was divided in spirit.

His father, Abraham, your great-grandfather, was, from all accounts, very much what I should like you to be—a man great and strong in both body and spirit, each sustaining the other; a man of vision and sensibility, and forceful withal; a hero, able to fight with his hands if need be, not merely with his brain. His son, Isaac, was a less heroic man. Although he was very able, and could do great things on the land, he had difficulty in maintaining himself against the Philistines among whom he lived. He thought he could escape conflict by appeasing and giving way to them despite his superiority. The result was that

though they feared his powers they had pushed him about and taken from him place after place which he had developed; and they finally left him in peace at Beer-sheba only after they got him to swear he would never attack them.

My father was not forceful: He had inherited a robust body and a thoughtful and sensitive mind but these were at odds with each other, possibly due to the increasing blindness with which he was unfortunately afflicted in mid-life; he came to set power above vision; force appeared to him more admirable, certainly more successful in this world, than vision or sensibility, which made for discomfort of mind. Hence Esau was my father's favorite—Esau who could hunt and fight and take what he wanted; Esau who was untroubled by perceptions and qualms of the spirit.

It seemed then rather odd that it should be so, because my father who was still, despite his blindness, a strong man like his father, Abraham, was, unlike Esau, always gentle, and concerned with the perceptions of the spirit, for he was a poet. He spoke with great dignity and beauty, and he was forever quoting not only from his own poems but from the poetry of the past—poetry which had come down from ancient times and which interested Esau not at all, Esau being apparently immune to the influence of poetry and scornfully heedless of anything out of the past.

Esau in fact never had much use for anything in books, while I, from the earliest days I can remember, have loved reading and the wide world of imagining it brought. I used to read as a child until my eyes ached; and it delighted me as a father when I saw how quickly you, my child, picked up from your blocks all the letters of the

alphabet and recognized them, pointing them out in the books I read.

It early appeared that, as I have said, I had inherited all my father's love of language and I listened entranced to his poetry even before I understood it—just as you, my son, by the time you were two years old had learned to repeat with astonishing accuracy many songs and verses although their words still meant nothing to you. And you in time will have learned the meaning of those lines you sang and spoke so sweetly just as, in the midst of living experience, I have recalled with sudden understanding the poetry I learned from my father in childhood. So too, much of what you read here now, my son, may seem to you insignificant until in the light of your own experience it will become comprehensible. Then why, you may well ask, if only life itself teaches, why write and speak what becomes comprehensible only in the light of living experience? And to this I must reply that men are not apt to learn from life which is too fleeting and various to be apprehended except in taking thought with the help of words. Therefore we speak to each other, we cry, listen! We tell tales, sing songs, write verses . . .

My father, in his recollection of old poetry, of songs and psalms and proverbs, of stories from the beginnings of man's history on this earth which he spoke in the old-style language, seemed often to be mourning for the past, to which he would have liked to return because of his fears for the future. And perhaps that was why he loved Esau, who, though uninterested in the past, was himself much like one of the men of those ancient days when, as my father said, *there were giants in the earth*; and perhaps because my father saw in Esau's powers a protection from the precarious future, which, because of his blindness,

must always have troubled him: Again and again he said this:

*Truly the light is sweet,  
And a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun.  
Yea, if a man live many years, let him rejoice in them all;  
And remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many.  
All that cometh is vanity.*

*Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth;  
And let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth,  
And walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine  
eyes:  
But know thou, that for all these things God will bring  
thee to judgment.*

He used the old-fashioned poetic diction. He was also very much concerned about God and his mysteries:

*As thou knowest not what is the way of the wind,  
Nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is  
with child:  
Even so thou knowest not the work of God who doeth all.*

But most of all he spoke of old age and death:  
*Remember also thy Creator in the days of thy youth:*

*Or ever the evil days come,  
And the years draw nigh,  
When thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them:*

*Or ever the sun,  
And the light,  
And the moon,  
And the stars,  
Be darkened,  
And the clouds return after the rain:*



*In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble,  
And the strong men shall bow themselves,  
And the grinders cease because they are few,  
And those that look out of the windows be darkened,  
And the doors shall be shut in the street;  
When the sound of the grinding is low  
And one shall rise up at the voice of a bird,  
And all the daughters of music shall be brought low;*

*Yea, they shall be afraid of that which is high,  
And terrors shall be in the way;  
And the almond tree shall blossom,  
And the grasshopper shall be a burden,  
And the caper-berry shall burst:*

*Because man goeth to his long home,  
And the mourners go about the streets:*

*Or ever the silver cord be loosed  
Or the golden bowl be broken,  
Or the pitcher be broken at the fountain,  
Or the wheel broken at the cistern:*

*And the dust return to the earth,  
As it was;  
And the spirit return unto God  
Who gave it.*

Though my mother was proud of his talent she did not like his dwelling on such lugubrious subjects. Nor did she like his poetry when it became difficult to understand. She would get him to repeat the songs he had sung when they first met:

*Behold thou art fair, my love; behold thou art fair;  
Thine eyes are as doves. . . .*

or the psalms he addressed to her in the first years of their marriage:

*A virtuous woman who can find?  
For her price is far above rubies.*

*The heart of her husband trusteth in her,  
And he shall have no lack of gain.  
She doeth him good and not evil  
All the days of her life.  
She seeketh wool and flax,  
And worketh willingly with her hands.  
She is like the merchant-ships,  
She bringeth her food from afar  
She riseth also while it is yet night,  
And giveth meat to her household,  
And their task to her maidens. . . .*

"Why not write more poems such as you used to, Isaac, about pleasant things," complained my mother, "the sort of things people like to read?"

"Because," said my father, "since those days I have learned about the less pleasant parts of life, and the poet must speak of whatever he knows."

"Then why not speak plainly? There are times, Isaac, when I just don't know what you are driving at.

*And the almond tree shall blossom,  
And the grasshopper shall be a burden,  
And the caper-berry shall burst.*

Now what do you mean by that?"

"It isn't always possible, my dear," said my father with a patience I then observed sometimes with a certain scorn. "It isn't always possible to find words which say clearly what one feels; there are some things in life which are not

easily expressed. In those three lines I tried to suggest the failing of a man's powers before death—in the years when his hairs turn white and sparse like the almond blossoms, when the very lightest of things become burdensome, and his decay is like that of the over-ripe berry.”

My mother, still unconvinced, shook her head as she took up her sewing. “There are some things in life which it might be better to leave unsaid. You put too much stock in words, Isaac.”

“In words,” said my father hesitantly, “in words there is beauty and the power of creation, Rebekah. Even God had to say ‘Let there be light’ before there was light.”

And since then I have come to feel that in words there is also the power to secure the reality of our lives which otherwise becomes dreamlike—forgotten, or dimly and incredibly recalled. Only when it has been told does the fleeting life become fixed and real, and hence, as I have said, comprehensible. In this telling of my own life, I am doing both. My father, in poetry, seemed to be concerned only for the essence, not the reality of existence.

When he had left us my mother said to me, “You were a babbler too, Jacob, when you were still a baby. You would sit on the floor and chatter incomprehensible talk before you knew a single word. And you learned words fast. I hope when you are a man that you won’t try, as some men do, to reach up to heaven with words.” She bit off the thread. “I will tell you a story.” She rethreaded her needle. “It is a very old story and I will tell it to you just as your father told it to me:

*And the whole earth was of one language and of one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there.*

*And they said to one another, Go to, let us make brick and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar. And they said, Go to, let us build us a city, and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven, and let us make us a name; lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth. And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded. And the Lord said, Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is what they begin to do: and now nothing will be withholden from them, which they purpose to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Therefore was the name of it called 'Babel'; because the Lord did there 'confound' the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.*

"And the meaning of that story, my son," said my mother, folding her sewing neatly and looking at me gravely with her dark brown eyes, "the meaning is that men, when they try to climb up into heaven with their words, get confounded; because God is jealous of his divinity. Now you are like your father in that words come easily to you. And words are fine persuasive things and you can do a lot with them. But remember to stick to the earth with your words and you will go further."

Young as I was, I sensed even then something of the disillusionment of my mother in that poetry with which my father had first captivated her heart and then revealed to her the failure of his own life. For my father, because his poetry seemed to have little effect on the world which it reflected and addressed, thought himself a failure. He

had doubtless dreamed of becoming, with his gifts, a celebrated man, eminent and influential, like his father, Abraham. But for all his strength he lacked some essential quality, that dauntless belief in his own powers with which Abraham had left the idolatrous people of Haran to go and establish in Canaan a nation devoted to the one true God of Creation.

"You will accomplish nothing in this world," my mother once said to me, "unless you have faith in what you are. People like you, Jacob, must have the same reliance in the powers of the mind as the Esaus have in the strength of their bodies."

My blind father lacked faith in his vision.

My mother was, in a way, right in saying that he should have written happier poems; a pessimist is apt to have little faith in himself and therefore little influence on others. And my father was, in a way, right in saying that sensitivity (which is apt to make for pessimism) is a fault and not a virtue. He used to chide me for being sensitive and reserved. "You will never get on in this world," he said, "unless you learn how to go to people and make them do what you wish." And he would hold Esau up as an example—Esau who was not thoughtful but active, not gentle but violent, Esau who respected and feared no one. My father held his own sensitivity, and the gift it gave him, of no account in that hard, practical world in which his poems appeared to him to have no value. You could get no venison with them. And it seemed to him that the fortunate man was he who had no wish to speak to the world, only to wrest from it what he wanted; and was able to do so. That was why he loved my brother, Esau, who was not a lover of words, but who could hunt, and

who brought him all the venison he liked—or so it seems to me now.

And I must confess that I too, as a boy, used to envy my red-haired brother the advantages he had got without effort on his part: Having been born sooner he had the birthright; and for no special reason he was strong, much stronger than I. My arms and legs were slender, my hands small and thin-skinned; Esau was burly, big-handed and barrel-chested. He could run and jump like a deer; he could fight like a lion. His body was restless and violent; with me it was the mind that was restless, that drove the body to action. But Esau was always ready to fight, he loved fighting. He feared no creature, and even when angered or hurt he seemed not to suffer as much as I. He hated restraint and was often disobedient. He avoided study and prayers, and was frequently punished for refusing to stop a game when our mother called him. Because any punishment was painful and abhorrent to me, I would try to persuade Esau to leave his play when there was some duty to be performed; but, engrossed in his pleasure, he would rather take the consequences; and sometimes I envied him his wildness and freedom from restraint. He was so much at home in this hazardous world, whose conflicts appeared almost to have been made for his gratification; while I, shy, gentle, unaggressive—I, who seemed to have gathered and concentrated in myself all the sensibilities of both my mother and my father—I, who took delight in the beauties and intricacies I discovered all about in creation, suffered nevertheless from many imperfections and slights my too sensitive nature perceived.

That sensitivity was heightened by an illness in my youth. It did not seem severe—merely a fever and aching

in my limbs which kept me in bed for a while. But when I recovered I was thin, wasted and weak for a time and my heart beat rapidly, palpitated with the slightest effort. And for years I was almost always conscious of that beating which, like an ever-present clock, made me conscious of the swift and constant passage of time, and impatient to be getting on in the world. Time meant more to me than to my brother Esau, who rose each day eager only for what that day offered while I was anxious to crowd it full of whatever I might learn and discover. At each day's end Esau lay down to sleep weary but satisfied with that day's hunting, while I could hardly rest with excitement for the more ambitious plans I had for the next day. But I was cautioned not to tax my strength by over-exertion until I had fully recovered.

You, Joseph, who are so restless and active may imagine with what envy I would see my brother vault carelessly over a fence while I walked carefully around through the gate, or saw him plunge wildly off a high rock into a pool while I waded slowly into the shallow water. High places made me dizzy; but with fast-beating heart I would force myself to climb them because I envied Esau who could clamber and walk on high as careless and certain as a cat. And even when I had done it I was not satisfied because I knew he never bothered about wishing to do such things while I had to will it with fixed determination.

On the other hand, ideas came to me easily, as if out of the air, while you could almost hear Esau's brain creaking when he tried to think something out; his arguments were laughably unsound; he came to the most absurd conclusions; he stubbornly believed the silliest things.

My mother made me eat nourishing food so that I might be "strong as Esau"; but she would say that it was a mark

of the superior man, of the man of feeling, that his heart beat faster; that he was more easily moved than the clod-like men who hardly knew they had hearts. And though in time and with care I trained and toughened my slender body to fortitude and endurance, I had to use it with circumspection; and all my life I have been more aware than others of that precarious beating of which most men take no notice, of that beating whose stoppage means death.

During my illness Esau had helped to carry me about, and thereafter he treated me as his inferior. When I got well enough he would wrestle with me, and it was his great delight to get me down and hurt me until my heart beat so fast that I gave up for fear of what might happen. And nothing made Esau happier than such a victory. I can still see the satisfied gleam in his ruddy eyes as he made me admit how much stronger he was than I, before he would let me go. And each victory strengthened my envious desire to surpass him in one way or another. And in my young manhood, at sight of a man gifted like my brother Esau with a powerful body, well-muscled, and endowed inwardly with never-failing organs, envy of that effortless possession would rise up in me, for it is one thing to be endowed with strength and another to have to achieve it.

My mother, however, preferred even my more delicate beauty to Esau's rough boyishness. I remember how loath she was to cut the fine silky curls that clustered all over my head. It was only when I wept bitterly that I would not go about like a girl but wanted to look like Esau, whose stiff crop of hair was sheared short, that she finally consented to cut mine.

But unlike Isaac, my father, this envy of power did not divide my spirit. For such physical prowess I would not,



if I could, have bartered with Esau nor with any other the possession I valued most, the strength and agility of my mind, a gift I early exhibited and which my mother did her best to foster and develop in me. Ceaselessly she taught me—in song, in story, in precept and maxim, in talk full of wisdom. And when Esau, as he frequently delighted to do, would make me feel puny by tauntingly daring me to perform after him some feat which he knew very well I could not accomplish, I would run for comfort to my mother, who, as she basted a roast in the oven or sat sewing a seam in the garden, could in a few words make me feel like a king, gifted and favored above all men. She would quote some old proverb:

*Wisdom is the principal thing;  
Get wisdom:  
Yea, with all thou hast gotten  
Get understanding.*

*Exalt her, and she shall promote thee:  
She shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her.  
She shall give to thine head a chaplet of grace:  
A crown of beauty shall she deliver to thee.*

One day, crossing the brook which ran brawling through our woods, it occurred to me how much more comfortable it would be to be able to cross comfortably and dry-shod. I gathered some light fallen logs and, taking advantage of a rock and a mound which beavers had built in the stream, I cunningly constructed a bridge. I was enjoying the convenience of my own device when Esau arrived. I was hoping that Esau would like my bridge, would use it and praise me for it, much as I often expressed my admiration for his strength. But Esau never could see or

enjoy any prowess but his own; and he was scornful and suspicious of any ability he did not possess, especially quickness of mind—a suspicion which, I must admit, events, in a way, justified for him. Far from admiring my resourcefulness he sneered at my patience, scorned to use my device, and with a running start he cleared the brook at a bound; and having challenged me to do the same, laughed at me and went on. With that bound he made my patiently contrived bridge seem a dull, petty thing, and in that unhappy moment I would have given my resourceful brain for the easy power and grace of Esau's leap.

"But what does it matter," my mother said soothingly, "whether or not you can jump a brook, if you can bridge it? And I for one shall certainly appreciate your work when I wish to cross the brook. Surely you are not envious of Esau, who could not have thought out such a thing if he tried. Surely you have no wish to be Esau. Esau, with his leap, took only himself across. You, with the cunning of your mind, have made a way for many. The Esaus of this earth, strong as they are, serve only themselves until the thoughtful Jacobs, who serve all mankind, come and set them to useful labor. And the power you have is enhanced with age. You will build greater things with your brain, while his power will grow less and wear out as his body grows old. You will see, in time, how much more powerful you really are. In older times, in the days of Cain and Abel, the mighty man did destroy the gentle man; but that is so no more. For in these times the gentle men of good will have learned wisdom and with their subtle thoughts can outwit the mightiest, for all their violence . . ."

Do not think for a moment that I enjoyed life in those days any less than my brother; indeed, I think I enjoyed

it more. Esau needed some violent activity and the excitement of risk for his fun; otherwise he got bored. I could sit on a stone in a quiet field and find excitement in the clouds moving across the vast sky or the minute life in the grass at my feet. Esau's enjoyments and satisfactions for all their violence seemed to me superficial and not deeply felt, while mine were profound and intense because of my awareness of what gave me pleasure. I remember how you, my son, when you began to speak would repeat over and over the exciting things you were going to do and which gave you pleasure. Holding a stone in your tiny hand you would say over and over, "Joey make a 'plash, Joey make a 'plash,"—before you cast it into the water. It used to remind me of my father's remark that God had to say, "Let there be light," before there was light. But I knew that you were savoring, as I had, too, as a child, those inner excitements of life in a way which it seemed to me Esau missed when he scorned my quieter pleasures.

But, between the scorn of my brother, Esau, and the love of my mother, Rebekah, I became aware of that endless struggle for supremacy which has existed since the beginning of mankind on this earth between the two kinds of men who inhabit it—the men of force and action and the men of thought and sensibility, the men of violence and the men of peace, the men for whom life is primarily self-gratification and those for whom it is nothing without aspiration. Esau had no wish to change the world as he found it—only to master and consume it; while, even as a boy, deep in me burned the desire to make better what I found imperfect, to make right what was wrong, to make easy what was difficult in this life.

How much of this spirit in me was dictated by the sickness I had suffered and the frailty of my boyish body it is now hard to say. Certainly strong agile Esau needed no bridge for that brook, and I, with my too-fast-beating heart, did need one. How much of the nature of the spirits of men is dictated by the imperfections of their bodies remains yet to be determined. For it is not merely the frail who become spiritual men—as witness your doughty great-grandfather Abraham, who was great indeed in spirit, and whose like I trust you will be; nor is it only the sturdy who are drawn into the camp of the mindless ones, for I know many a frail and sensitive man who runs with the violent men, thinking that only with them is there safety, security and survival. And often enough, as in the case of your grandfather Isaac, the struggle between the way of might and the way of mind goes on in one man; goes on to some degree indeed, it seems to me, now, in each of us. You, my son, may suffer something of that inward conflict. I take delight in your vigorous though slender body. I see you clambering, jumping and sliding now like a little daredevil, climbing up and diving with a shout from the window ledge to the couch beside me. Yet your little brain is eager too. You learn so quickly. I had only to show you once how to hold your shirt sleeve down when you put on your coat; how to hammer and draw a nail. I had only to tell you once the names of the flowers and the creatures about you; of the days of the week. I have only to teach you once or twice a song or a poem to fix it in your mind. So already I see your sensibility setting you surely into the role of the man of spirit, and you are destined, I know, to struggle with your earthier brothers.

But however that may be, this much I have learned—from Rebekah, my mother, and from Rachel, your mother, and from other women—that in this conflict it is us, the men of spirit and sensibility, whom women, for the most part, stand with and support.

*...Thy brother came with guile...*

I HAVE come to look with no little amusement upon the spectacle most men make strutting in the forefront of events, knowing full well how much they depend upon women not only to nourish and comfort their bodies but to sustain their spirits, how important a role, for all men's posturing, women have long played behind them. And I have come to think that the man behind whom no woman stands is a man to be feared.

But the extent to which women will support the Jacobs as against the Esaus among men I first realized when my mother helped me get from my father the blessing he intended for my brother. Since the scandalous acts of men are more often recalled than their virtuous doings, the story of that deception will doubtless be made well known to you; and I am frank enough to call it a deception—and to admit that the deception of a blind man by his son and his wife is a not altogether admirable proceeding. Nevertheless there were extenuating aspects of that event which are not generally considered—especially in the attitude of Esau.

Take for example the matter of his selling his birthright to me before the deception, the circumstances of that event also being generally misapprehended. We were well-grown young men by then, required to provide for ourselves, and Esau could have seen as well as I that the crops that year would be poor because of the long drought we had in the spring. But while I was foresightedly sowing and cultivating my field of lentils he went right on amusing himself, doing what pleased him, hunting and fishing only for the day, not worrying about tomorrow. The strong are apt to be improvident because they feel they can get what they want whenever they want it; they are not given to worrying, to looking ahead very far; perhaps they merely lack the power of imagination . . . But, be that as it may, the time came when I reaped the harvest of my foresightedness; and, the hunt having failed him, Esau, lacking breadstuff as well as meat, came to me one day, faint with hunger, just as I was sitting down to eat.

It was then I learned to my surprise that powerful men, since they have not of necessity, like their frailer brothers, been inured to suffering, are apt not to know how to suffer, are apt not to stand suffering very well. Esau was desperately hungry.

"Feed me, I beg of you," he cried, "some of that red pottage." Never before had the strong and scornful Esau begged anything of me. For the first time in my life I felt that I had the advantage of my brother. Is it to be wondered that I wished to taste my power a little?

I said, "What will you give me for my pottage, Esau?"

He said, "What do you want?" He said it carelessly, as one who, having the world in his grasp, or able to take it when he wished, is in the habit of being generous—which

I can truthfully say Esau often was, that is, when he was in a good mood.

But it was not generosity I wanted of Esau that day. Out of the depths of my being rose the wish to see just how much power over my brother my foresightedness, the cunning of my mind, had given me. So long had he shown me how much power over me the mere accident, the chance of his greater strength had given him. I thought of the highest possible price to ask—as one does in any bargaining—as a starting point from which to descend. I said, "Sell me your birthright."

To my astonishment, he only laughed. "You would want a birthright!" He said it scornfully. "What do you think that birthright means to me? If I die of hunger you will have it anyway; and as long as I live and have my strength I can seize whatever I want without a birthright. Only the feeble need the support of authority. The strong can take authority when they want it. If I weren't weak with hunger right now I'd take your pottage without so much as asking. Give it to me now and you can have the old birthright."

I could hardly believe my ears. "Swear to it," I said, to make sure, and he swore to it. And in that moment I despised my brother for the weakness of his spirit. No hunger would have moved me to give up my birthright to him.

Nevertheless Esau was incensed later when he learned that I deceived our father into giving me the blessing which went with the birthright. I had said nothing to my father or my mother about his having sold the birthright to me. But knowing it was legally mine and remembering how little he had valued it made it easier for me to fall in with my mother's suggestion that I put on some goatskins and



impersonate shaggy Esau before my blind father, and thus get his blessing while my brother was out hunting venison for him.

Knowing I had the birthright already, and being a little fearful of attempting to deceive my father, I did mildly suggest to my mother that I thought I might get along just as well without that blessing. "You may, indeed," said my mother, "but it is just as well in this life to have every possible advantage. And Esau will feel handicapped against you if you have it and he doesn't."

So I went to my father; and curiously enough I had the feeling not that I was deceiving him (although I don't wish to deny that I did so) but that he was deceiving himself; for he obviously suspected I was not Esau and went so far as to say, *the voice is the voice of Jacob's, but the hands are the hands of Esau*. But it was as if he were expressing a long-wished-for ideal—it was as if, for the sake of that combination of the sensitive voice which was like his own and the strong and ruthless hand of Esau which he envied, he was willing to be deceived.

*See, the smell of my son  
Is as the smell of a field which the Lord  
hath blessed:  
And God give thee of the dew of heaven,  
And of the fatness of the earth,  
And plenty of corn and wine:  
Let peoples serve thee,  
And nations bow down to thee: . . .*

Thus my father in his grandiose and poetic way blessed me, with a promise of wealth and power far beyond anything I have ever dreamed of. I have, for example, never had any desire to have nations bow down to me. Indeed

my dreams then and since then have been aspirations of a somewhat different sort. However, that blessing was not really intended for me but for Esau, whom it would have suited very well. And this proves, my son, that it is generally foolish to be envious of the blessings of others, because each man has his own peculiar needs.

As it turned out, much of my father's blessing did not come to pass; and what has come to pass, I may truthfully say I have had to struggle and work for; and I might conceivably have done just as well without that blessing, but for the sense of election it gave me, a sense which is helpful to most men and especially to the Jacobs. Perhaps it is because we do not get from our bodies the feeling an Esau gets of physical security in this precarious world that we needs must grasp every aid, every means of support we can find. That is not to say that we are always justified in acting as we do. Indeed, I am not trying to excuse myself before you for anything I have done. Nor is it my intention here to advise you what is right and what wrong so much as to tell you how we behave.

For I often think it would be well if men could observe their own behavior, as an infant does the movements of his own hands and feet. I remember the objective curiosity with which you, my son, used to lie playing with and examining your limbs, even tasting your fingers and your toes, as if intent on learning all about them before you might use them properly. Perhaps in observing these, my acts, you will learn something pertinent to your own.

You will doubtless hear the whole story of that deception told without credit to me, and how Esau afterwards said of me, *Is he not rightly named Jacob—for he has supplanted me these two times: he took away my birth-right, and now he has taken away my blessing, forgetting*

that he had freely sold me the birthright and that without it the blessing really meant nothing—and that in any case a blessing should really mean no more than a birthright to a strong man who, as he put it, could seize whatever he wanted. You will find, my son, that powerful men are not given to logic or consistency. They have no use for such spiritual concepts and restraints, fortified as they are with the feeling that might makes right. Esau was wild; especially after he ran to my father begging for a blessing, and was told: *by the sword shalt thou live: and thou shalt serve thy brother*. . . . Whatever his failings, my father, a true poet, always said what he perceived. And Esau swore he would kill me.

My father was angry too. Naturally. But it was rather characteristic of him that he was less concerned about the practical consequences of the incident than grieved that a deception had been practiced. It was the principle of the thing he kept harping on, until my mother, irritated by his painful references to the part she—"a woman, a wife and mother"—had played in this shady business, burst out, "Women are sometimes driven to deception! Without deception Eve would never have become the mother of mankind. None of us would now be here had she waited for Adam to pick that fruit from the tree. And men, I suppose," her voice was edged with sarcasm, "men never practice deception—your own father Abraham, for example, with his tale about taking you up on Mount Moriah to sacrifice you as a burnt offering at God's command."

"There was no deception about that," said my father. "I was there. Though I was then a small child I remember how my father rose early in the morning, and saddled his ass and took two of his young men with him, and took me and the wood he had chopped for the burnt offering."

"But he left his young men at the foot of the mountain, didn't he—told them to wait there with the ass until he returned?"

"Yes," said my father. "But I remember how he put the wood on my back and took the fire and the knife and we went up and I said, 'Father,' and he said, 'Yes, my son,' and I said, 'We have fire and wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?' and he said, 'God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son,' and we went on up together, and my father built an altar and laid the wood in order, and bound me and laid me on the altar, on the wood; and he stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay me. And the angel of the Lord called to him out of Heaven . . ."

"Did you hear it?" interrupted my mother.

"No. He was not speaking to me; but my father did."

"So he said," said my mother.

"And I remember clearly," persisted my father, "the ram caught in the thicket by his horns."

"That was most conveniently arranged, wasn't it?" said my mother.

"And I remember particularly," my father went on, ignoring my mother's insinuation, "how my father cut me loose and took the ram and offered him for a burnt offering instead of me."

"And then went down," continued my mother earnestly, "and told his young men and all the world how God had forbid him to sacrifice a human being but had provided an animal for a scapegoat. And, though it has all the earmarks of a cunning deception contrived by your clever father, a fine lesson indeed it was in those benighted days when men were given to human sacrifice, and a fine lesson such a deception might still be for the benefit of

those who to this day are given to making scapegoats of their fellow men. And a deception, Isaac," said my mother, gently now, but still firmly, "a deception, whether by man or woman, is still needed sometimes when men cannot be persuaded otherwise to do what is best. You would never listen to me when I tried to tell you that the blessing would be wasted on a man like Esau."

"But I've told you again and again, Rebekah, that Esau had the right of priority; he came first," remonstrated my father.

"Right, might; priority, miority!" cried my mother. And no one can be more scornful of law than a woman. "What if Esau did come first? Because the beasts came first on this earth are they given any rights over man?"

Then my mother took me aside and wept that I would have to go away for a while, out of reach of my brother's vengeance. Though I had envied his strength, I had never really feared my brother because I had thought, and still thought, I could, with the help of my brain, cope with him. But my mother said, "Don't be foolish, Jacob. Men like you aren't made for fighting. I don't mean that you should let yourself be despoiled and pushed around as your father was by the Philistines, but you must learn to get what you need and go your way without strife. Your kind are like women, in that you need peace to do your work. We must have peace in which to bring forth and raise our children. You need peace to bring to pass what is in your fruitful and cunning minds. And yet, strangely, it is just your kind who are apt to make trouble for themselves, to disturb their own peace, to get themselves driven out so that they have to make their own way in the dangerous world. Well, that is your destiny. That's how it works."

It occurred to me then that since she believed in destiny

it was odd that my mother had felt moved and justified in deliberately tampering with its working as she had in my case. But the attitude of women toward destiny is something no reasonable man is likely ever to understand. I have told you already about how your mother thought she tricked destiny when you were born.

“And anyway, it is probably for the best,” my mother said, wiping away her tears, “that you should have to be parted from me, my son. It is not well for men to be too much attached to their mothers. That, I have sometimes thought, was what weakened your father—he had never really got away from Sarah, his mother; and I merely took her place.”

*...if Jacob take a wife...*

RARELY, my son, will you hear women speak well of one another. It may be that they are so often competing with each other for the affection of a man—whether it be a son or a father, a husband or a lover. And it is competition, I have learned, which makes for much of the ill-will among mankind—among men as well as women—competition whether for love or power, wealth or fame. And yet it is competition too, I know, which makes for much of the striving, the aspiration and progress of mankind. Thus you will find, unfortunately, that, like competition, practically every motive in this life is neither wholly evil nor wholly good, so that it is not ever easy for a man to judge and choose rightly the precept and principle for his own conviction and guidance.

My mother in sending me away made clear to me how difficult it is to know what is “right” and what is “good.” It is not good, she said, for a son to remain attached to his mother as if the cord between them had not been cut; though from that very parting, from that very freedom

comes the insecurity because of which the peace he needs is difficult to achieve. Thus is the good inextricably entangled with the bad, from the very beginning of our lives when as infants we need to cry aloud for the good of our lungs.

I see that I have wandered again from the thread of my story. Do not therefore say that I am a garrulous old man. For no life is merely a thread, it is more like a figured cloth woven of many threads so that when you try to follow one of its significant strands you must needs come across many other threads of rich color and meaning. And no man's story is a complete weaving, finished and framed, but a piece, a fragment cut from the endless tapestry of all life, so that at one end of mine the threads lead into yours, Joseph, and at the other they lead to my mother, Rebekah, and to my father, Isaac, and thence to my grandmother, Sarah, whom, I started to say, my mother blamed in part for the rather weak nature, the ineffectuality of my father.

"Your grandmother Sarah," my mother once said, "was a pretty strong-minded woman for all her famous laughter. Being barren herself and having given Abraham her maid, Hagar, so that they might have a child—something I had the good sense not to do with your father—she heartlessly got Abraham to send Hagar away when Hagar, having conceived Ishmael, quite naturally got insolent, uppity, as any woman would under the circumstances. I know something about women, and it has always seemed to me," said my mother, "that Sarah's laughter, when she heard of God's promise to Abraham that she would conceive, was not so much amusement as a challenge, a dare to the Lord to bring that to pass. And, it being a man's God she was goading, her trick worked, of course. The Lord said to Abraham, *Why did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I surely*



*bear a child, at my age? And then added, in a huff, Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the set time I will come back and Sarah shall have a son!* And sure enough, she did—though she tried to deny to Abraham that she had laughed.

“And when Isaac was born,” my mother went on, “she was worried that he would have to fight his brother Ishmael, a pretty wild lad, to be sure, wilder even than our Esau; and she was worried about Ishmael, the elder son, getting any of the inheritance of Abraham at the expense of her Isaac. Sarah would not let Isaac strengthen his spirit in struggling with Ishmael, as you, Jacob, have done with Esau. Nor would she stoop, as I did, to any harmless little device of deception for getting from Abraham the blessing for her Isaac. On the day she weaned Isaac she baldly demanded of Abraham that he drive Hagar and her son Ishmael out into the wilderness—which he did.

“And when I think of Isaac’s mother,” said my mother, “what I have done for your sake, Jacob, seems pretty mild in comparison. Time, I suppose, has made women softer,” she reflected. All the same I suspected that were it not for Isaac’s attachment to Esau, and the anger she had already roused in him with her deception, she would have tried to get my father to send Esau away, and kept me there.

For, as she spoke of Sarah, to whom she was not related by blood—though they came from the same country—but only in the matter of sex, it seemed to me that these two women, Rebekah and Sarah, your grandmother and your great-grandmother, were curiously alike in spirit. And since then it has come to me that for all their variety which women display to men, who are forever choosing among them, in time each man comes to think how much

alike they are, essentially, I mean—especially in their feeling about men. Women will, of course, vehemently deny this. Women don't want men restless although they don't like them timid; and my mother, I know, hated to see me go, for all her talk about it being for the best.

"Sarah," said my mother, "having got the great Abraham under her thumb by bearing him a son—and mind you don't let that happen to you, Jacob," she added—"Sarah then tied her son Isaac to her—never let him leave her, even when it came time for him to get married. Indeed it was not until after she died that Isaac got a wife, and then he did not go out and get one for himself but Abraham sent his servant to look for a suitable woman for Isaac among his kindred in Haran, in the town of Abraham's brother.

"So one evening when I went down to the well by the city gate with my pitcher on my shoulder, as I came up the steps there stood Abraham's servant. He said, 'Give me to drink, I beg of you, a little water from your pitcher.' And I said, 'Drink,' and let down the pitcher on my hand, and gave him a drink."

As I listened to my mother I marveled that she could recall in such detail what had happened so long ago and could not at the time have appeared particularly important to her; but I have since learned that women remember the insignificant beginnings of things, about which they seem to have an intuition. A man is more apt to remember the end; and I doubt if I should now be able to recall my first vision of your mother as I do the last, were it not that she so frequently recalled it. But of both I shall tell you in due course.

"And as he took the water," my mother went on, "he looked steadily at me all the while and then gave me a

golden ring and two golden bracelets and asked whose daughter I was and was there room in my father's house for him to lodge in. Then I went to tell my mother, and my brother Laban came and took him home and was impressed by the evident wealth Abraham's servant represented. And when he asked for my hand for Isaac, my mother and my brother asked me would I go to marry Isaac. And being young and a virgin I had romantic visions of an unknown faraway prince, and so I said, Yes; and returned with the servant to Canaan and met Isaac there for the first time, and was a little shocked, a bit disappointed, I must admit, to find him a rather large, but rather ordinary-looking man, thoughtful but not very talkative, poetic but not dashing, a man who, it appeared, still missed his mother, who had died. And I sometimes think, when I look at the two sons who came of that love, that at first he only half loved me and half resented me.

"Isaac," my mother went on, "was the son of a too-strong-minded mother and a too-illustrious and able father. The sons of daring and successful fathers are apt to be rather fearful and conservative. When he dealt with God it was always the God of his father—not his own, which it seems to me each man should strive to find for himself—though, being only a woman, it is still not quite clear to me why men, even men as great as Abraham, are so dependent on their gods! However that may be, although a man may be satisfied with his father's God it seems to me he ought at least to find his own woman. Isaac took me into his mother's house and married me and loved me and has been a good husband, better than most, I'm sure; and many marriages used to be made that way. But for you, Jacob, and for your wife too, I want marriage to be different. I want you to find a wife for yourself.

"So go to Haran, to the house of my brother Laban, and stay there while Esau forgets his anger. Travel will give you experience. It is an old proverb that *He that has no experience knows few things; but he that has wandered shall increase his skill.* And it will be good for you to be away from me and your father; and meanwhile you will find yourself a woman there after your own heart whom you will love and who will love you before you marry. That's how a man and a woman should go into marriage."

I assured my mother that I would much rather have it that way.

"And so would most women," said my mother. "It is when we are being chosen by a man that we really have some choice in the matter."

When she broached the idea to my father of my going away, she began by citing the advantages of travel. But my father interrupted her irritably, "It is an old proverb that a rolling stone gathers no moss."

But my mother was not easily put off. "What does an old proverb signify? Say it in one tone of voice and it means that he who wanders gets no store of wealth or wisdom. But say it another way and it means that he who travels does not become overgrown like a dead thing but remains clean and polished." Then she went off on another tack, started talking about sending me off to Haran to find myself a wife; and my father, still smarting from the trick we had played on him said, "Do you think Jacob can be trusted to pick for himself? Why not send someone to do it for him, as it was done for me?"

"Jacob wants to go away," said my mother.

"*The wicked flee when no man pursueth,*" said my father.

My mother lost her temper. "It is all very fine being a

poet—commenting beautifully on life and not doing much about it; but there are times when less poetry and more action is needed.”

I have said that she loved his poetry, but his critical ineffectuality—the result of the division in his spirit, of his lack of faith in his own vision—sometimes irritated my mother to the point where she thought that even his blindness was a part of his escape from the need for action. But then, seeing the pain in his sightless eyes, she said, “Try to forget the boy’s deception, Isaac. It is really not so dreadful for parents to be deceived. We need it sometimes. What is always harmful is to deceive a child. Anyway, Esau has sworn to kill him.”

“Jacob has my blessing and the Lord will be with him,” said my father.

“The Lord was for Abel too,” said my mother firmly, “yet Cain slew him. I am not going to let Esau kill Jacob. If their God won’t protect the gentle and godly men then their women will. Jacob must go somewhere, Isaac, and it may as well be to his relatives. Remember that your mother sent your brother Ishmael away for your sake. I am not sending Esau away. I am sending Jacob away for his own sake.” My mother, repentant for the hurt she had caused him, was being patient, as only she could be when she wished. “And anyway, Jacob wants to know the woman he marries, to love her first.”

“And you, Rebekah, must encourage him in all his romantic notions. Well, let him go. He will certainly fare no worse picking for himself in Haran than I did when my father sent his servant there on my account. In any case a man doesn’t really live with the woman he marries, even if he picks her himself.” It was some years before I realized

what my father meant by that cryptic remark. But my mother immediately bridled.

"Of that, Isaac, you are really not in a position to judge," she said rather sharply.

"Esau, who has picked his own women, would agree with me, I'm sure," he went on.

"But Jacob will not pick his woman as Esau does," retorted my mother; and with that remark I could heartily agree.

I knew Esau's attitude toward women. It was one of the few topics about which my brother seemed to enjoy talking to me, not only in our boyhood, before he began pursuing women, taking every one he could lay his big hands on as a bull takes every cow he can mount, but later when he was married and I was still a virgin youth. Although he was scornful of it, my celibacy piqued Esau's curiosity, especially as he had learned from his women that I was not unattractive to them.

"My wife Adah tells me that the Hittite girls are all crazy about you," Esau would say. Esau did not know, of course, that once, when he was away hunting, his Adah herself had met me in the fields and let me caress her and said she would lie with me if I wished, so that I had to remind her that she was my brother's wife.

"I don't know what they see in you," said Esau, "but I suppose it's because you are so standoffish. Women always want what they can't have. Show them you want them and they run from you. Anyway, you're a fool not to take them, Jacob. What's the matter with you? Don't you want a woman?"

Of course I wanted a woman. But I didn't try to explain it to Esau. There are things it is impossible for the Jacobs

and the Esaus of this earth to explain to each other. But I want to explain it to you, my son.

Of course I wanted a woman. Except for the likes of the Sodomites, men want women long before they are themselves aware of their desire. I remember the astonishment of Rachel, your mother, one day when she was still suckling you, to find you, an infant at her breast, displaying the evidence of your manhood. As a child I had heard a story of a king who chose his queen from among the most beautiful virgins his vizier had gathered from all the provinces of his kingdom, and there was a period for months in my boyhood when each night after my mother had put me to bed I indulged myself before sleep in a fantasy: I sat on a throne watching an endless array of fair women brought before me and unveiled, one by one, so that I might choose the fairest among them—though for what purpose I could as yet scarcely imagine. Yet when I was a grown youth and could very well imagine why I wanted a woman—having watched the beasts of the field and listened to the boastings of my brother Esau—still I refrained. To hear Esau talking of love, it was just another kind of hunting or even a sort of warfare; though I sometimes envied him his ability to take those Hittite girls as he found them. All women, said Esau, are alike. And though there were times, in the mild moonlit nights of spring, when the aching desire of the loins almost overcame the wishful dreams of the heart and the censure and aspiration of the spirit, yet did I refrain. The Hittite women did not please me. They were sometimes handsome, as indeed Esau's Adah was, but generally they were common, large, with coarse reddish hair. None of them was like my mother, small-boned, with fine dark hair and dark eyes. It seemed that all their children must be like

Esau. Not that I need have married to lie with some of them. But even for that they displeased me. For unlike my brother Esau, my mind and heart were at odds with my loins in the presence of such women; I refrained from them and I dreamed of seeking out a woman whom I would truly love, with all my heart, with all my soul, and with all my might, and who would love me likewise. Mere possession would not satisfy me.

I once ventured to say this to Esau, but he laughed aloud, incredulous and scornful. Of course he had no notion of what I was saying. But you, my son, will in time understand; because you, I can see even now, will be a man of sensibility; you will refrain, you will turn away from women who appeal only to your flesh and not to your spirit. You will, perhaps, even have to fly from them; for I have observed that though the Esaus masterfully take many more women than the discriminating Jacobs, it is we, the Jacobs, who are much more beloved and wanted by women, be they the coarse Hittites, or the sweet women of Haran—like your mother, Rachel, and my mother, Rebekah. Yet I must warn you, that all your discrimination and restraint may not keep you from getting involved with women who are not your true heart's desire. And how that came about with me I shall tell you in due course.

My mother despised the Hittite women. But that did not influence Esau, who had not the slightest respect for the opinion and spirit of any woman; and women can have no great affection for a man they cannot influence.

My mother couldn't stand Esau's wives. *They are a grief of mind to me*, she would say to Isaac in her outlandish way; and the mere thought of my having anything to do with them had always troubled her. She wel-



came therefore this occasion for sending me off to find myself a wife from among her own people, a woman like herself. For all she had said about the influence of Sarah on Isaac and the need for a son to get away from the influence of his mother, it was clear that though some other woman—a woman after my own heart—was bound to take her place in my affection, nevertheless she wanted it to be someone of her own kind.

“You will not forget your mother,” she said finally, and tears shone in her eyes. “Men must leave their mothers and go to women who do not give them peace but excitement. Men forget their mothers for a while, and it is best they should; but there comes a time when they return. I have no fear; you will not forget me, Jacob.”

And as for my father, at heart he too, I think, was glad to see me go seeking a wife in Haran. He had once or twice suggested the advantages of my marrying like Esau into one of the powerful and wealthy Hittite families; but though I suspect that my father, who all his life had been dominated by a woman—first his mother and then his wife—sometimes envied Esau his carefree way with those dull slavish women of his who dominated Esau’s life not at all, I know that my father disliked Esau’s wives as much as my mother did; and that for all their differences he loved my mother alone and would not have given her up for a hundred Hittite women.

Once I heard him say to her in his gently reproachful way, “It seems to me that all you women still resent God’s last dictum to Eve.”

“And what was that?” asked my mother.

“*. . . thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.*”

To this my mother said nothing; but she smiled.

She bore my father only two sons and died rather young; and though he tried to find another to replace her he never did. No other woman could make him happy after Rebekah was gone. And though while she lived he often found it difficult to agree with her he usually ended by doing so without regret, because she was very wise in the way good women are wise.

So after all their argument my father gave me his blessing; "But you will return. A man always returns to his father's house," he said, and sent me on my way to Haran.

*...And Jacob went out from Beer-sheba, and went toward Haran...*

IT IS NOT the rugged who travel farthest, who are the most restless. Esau, in his passionate hunting, might follow a deer for miles, but he would not go round a corner out of simple curiosity; while I, though my heart beat fast at the thought of meeting a wild beast or an unfriendly man, used to lose myself in boyhood wanderings in the wilderness and return exhausted from long excursions to which I was prompted, or, better said, driven, only because something restless in me wanted to know what kind of world this is, what lay behind that hill, where the winding brook led, what manner of men inhabited a distant town and how they lived. My brother did not look with interest but with suspicion on all that was strange to him; his impulse was to destroy what he did not know or understand. A stranger was an enemy to Esau. He would go to another country not to learn and enjoy but to ravage or conquer.

Looked at conservatively, Esau's was the safer point of view, in a sense the more timid; and my curiosity the more

dangerous. I thought him reckless in his lustful hunting of wild animals for food when he might safely raise tame cattle as I did. On the other hand, for the questionable value of the birthright and the blessing, I had risked his animosity and vengeance.

Every man finds it worth while taking chances for whatever will satisfy the needs of his own nature. In his mortally dangerous hunting Esau got not only food but the satisfaction of a lust for power beside which, when I saw its gleam in his red-brown eyes, all the gratifications of my own insatiable curiosity would seem thin and pale. Yet, on the other hand, the reassuring sense of superiority, of pre-eminence over him, which the mere idea of the birthright and blessing—hollow as they might prove to be—had given me, was gratifying enough to make me forget the dangers their acquisition had entailed; just as the lure of learning, of seeing and experiencing something new, was enough to make me forget the dangers of wandering.

So, though I could hardly bear to turn away from my mother's sweet face, from the light of her love for me shining through the tears in those quick dark eyes, from the comfort in those quick slender hands waving me farewell, it was not long before I was traveling with relief, with avidity—savoring an untrammelled freedom such as I had envied in Esau, leaving behind, dropping behind me, forgetting all the troublesome disturbance I had made for myself with the business of the birthright, and moving eagerly ahead through fresh scenes and excitements toward a new life—toward the future. It is difficult sometimes to distinguish between aspiration and escape.

As I went on, I recalled the words of my mother about

travel. For she was right; and how some women acquire their universal knowledge within their limited experience has remained one of their mysteries to me.

My mother was right. For in my wanderings I have seen many things, and because of them my understanding is more than my words can tell. Often I was in mortal danger and was preserved because of what I had learned from experience. There, as in many things, I find the living paradox: travel, experience, life itself is precarious, dangerous; but in travel, in experience, in living, you learn what will save you, what will keep you alive. Women like my mother, being practical, accept that paradox and live accordingly, but men like myself, idealistic, romantic, chafe at this paradox and keep asking—but why not learn from the experience of others; why must each of us experience painfully the same things over and over? Surely we can learn more easily by study, from the teaching of our forebears!

Thus, when you, an infant, were just beginning to crawl and climb, Rachel, your mother, and I used to argue. I would hear the unearthly howling you let loose when you were hurt; and once, leaving my labors, I came hurrying into the house to find you whimpering in your mother's arms as she sat rocking you by the fire while she kissed your tiny hand.

"What's happened?" I cried, fearing the worst.

"Nothing," said your mother. "He burnt his finger."

The mere thought of your pain clenched my heart and sickened me. "But how?"

"In the fire, of course," said your mother briefly.

"Do you mean to say you let him crawl to the fire, Rachel? How many times have I said the fire must be screened when he is crawling in here?"

"Oh, nonsense, Jacob. We can't always keep the fire screened and anyway he has got to learn sometime. He won't forget this."

"But he might have fallen in and destroyed himself. It seems to me he could be kept away from the fire until he is old enough to understand that it is dangerous."

She only answered with an impatient shrug of her shoulders and kissed your tear-wet face as you lay sobbing against her breast. . . .

There was that difference of approach to learning which she and I never reconciled; and here am I still hoping to teach you something by telling you of my own experience; although I know very well that you too in time will depart, will go your own way to experience, though the circumstances of your going will doubtless be very different.

But it was not for experience that I was so avid in going on that journey to Haran any more than it was for experience that you crawled into the fire that day. It was for the satisfaction of that curiosity, that aspiration to know our world with which as infants we are all endowed and which the Jacobs among us maintain insatiably throughout life, so that the Esaus, who outgrow it, are wont on that account to think us childlike.

Traveling then, out into the wide world, over hills and plains, through dense forests and fertile valleys, across desert places, by lakes and rivers and along the sandy seashore, and stopping to rest in the towns, in great cities and tiny villages, I learned much, by observation and inquiry, of the works and the ways of men.

When I was a youngster, when my father's sight first began to fail, he used to recite passages from a long poem—whether his own or someone's else I did not know, but

one of those unhappy ones which my mother scornfully said were "A waste of time and breath." I did not then get all the drift of it except that it was about a man who had many afflictions and complained to God about the injustice of them. But there was one passage which it was always exciting to hear:

*Man setteth an end to darkness,  
And searcheth out to the furthest bound  
The stones of thick darkness and the shadow of death.  
He breaketh open a shaft away from where men sojourn;  
They are forgotten of the foot that passeth by;  
They hang afar from men, they swing to and fro.*

*As for the earth, out of it cometh bread  
And underneath it is turned up as it were by fire.  
The stones thereof are the place of sapphires,  
And it hath dust of gold. . . .*

*He putteth forth his hand upon the flinty rock;  
He overturneth the mountains by the roots.  
He cutteth out passages among the rocks;  
And his eye seeth every precious thing.  
He bindeth the streams that they trickle not;  
And the thing that is hid bringeth he forth to light.*

And when I traveled across the world seeing the great things men had done it was yet more meaningful and rousing and my spirit was stirred to the resolve that I too would do great things in this marvelous world of men.

One day, however, I came to a place where men had been at war. The battlefield was still strewn with the rotting corpses of slain men, and beyond it was a town laid waste, with the women, the children and the aged

driven from their homes which were reduced to ruinous heaps. . . .

I hurried on, with horror in my heart at the dreadful sight and with disdain for the stupidity of men who could not otherwise settle their differences than in needless death and destruction. Surely, I thought, the relations of men need not be attended by pain and violence, for at worst, it seemed to me, men at odds need only separate, each going his way, as I had gone from my brother, for surely there was room enough on the face of this fine wide earth for all men to live in peace. In a world vaster and richer than any man can imagine, surely men need not crowd or tread upon each other or stand in each other's light and way, making each other miserable, or warring upon each other for their lives. Indeed, as I hurried away, I liked very much my idea of individual freedom, of the individual free to seek unhindered his own unlimited aspiration.

So I went on: and I learned far more than I had in my curious boyhood wanderings of the infinite variety and awe-inspiring mystery of creation from the endless earth to the vast heavens. Everywhere I saw wonders and causes for wondering—in sand, soil, and rocks, in vegetation and tall trees, in the life that infests the earth, from worms and insects to the beasts of field and wood and fowl of the air, in sunlit clouds, in moonlit and starry skies.

And I recalled with new understanding how my father used to sing, in the psalm:

*He sendeth forth springs into the valleys;  
They run among the mountains:  
They give drink to every beast of the field;  
The wild asses quench their thirst.*



*By them the fowl of the heavens have their habitation,  
They sing among the branches.  
He watereth the mountains from his chambers:  
The earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works.  
He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle,  
And herb for the service of man:*

*That he may bring forth food out of the earth,  
And wine that maketh glad the heart of man,  
And oil to make his face to shine,  
And bread that strengtheneth man's heart.  
The trees of the Lord are satisfied;  
The cedars of Lebanon, which he had planted:  
Where the birds make their nests;  
As for the stork, the fir trees are her house;  
The high mountains are for the wild goats;  
The rocks are a refuge for the conies.*

*He appointed the moon for seasons:  
The sun knoweth his going down.  
Thou makest darkness, and it is night;  
Wherein all beasts of the forest do creep forth.  
The young lions roar after their prey,  
And seek their meat from God.  
The sun ariseth, they get them away,  
And lay them down in their dens.  
Man goeth forth unto his work  
And to his labor until the evening.*

*O Lord, how manifold are thy works!  
In wisdom hast thou made them all.*

Wonder led me to study, and study to knowledge.  
And in studying the manifold wonders of creation which  
met my eyes in my travels I fell, too, to considering the  
creator of all these, for knowledge then seemed to me  
man's way and approach to divinity.

Not that I had not considered this matter of divinity before. Esau and I used to have arguments about it. Our father was a pious man, God-fearing, very strict about religious observance, prayers, holy days and so on. What my mother thought about it I never knew precisely, since she never talked, as father often did, about a great and jealous and vengeful God; and though in her talk with my father she seemed no more fearful of his God than were Eve and Sarah before her, yet she prayed, and she saw to it that we carried out our father's wishes in this respect, and that we had our best clothes on for the Sabbath and got fine food for the feast days.

It was not difficult for me to accept the forms of my father's faith. With its invocations and celebrations it seemed a fitting expression of the mysterious awe and wonderful ecstasy I often experienced in springtime climbing a windy flower-strewn hill under the enormous sunlit blue heavens bedecked with white clouds, or sitting alone in the deep green gloom of the woods, or watching the curved silver of a new moon and the pale sparkling gemlike planets set one after another in the emerald dome of the darkening sky at evening. Sometimes, to be sure, the long-drawn-out services got very tiresome and seemed far removed in spirit from God's myriad wonders, so easily seen out of the window, where the birds flew about and sang his praises unconstrained and uncramped.

On such occasions Esau was apt to slip away and get into a game out of doors with some equally lawless youngsters. And he would pay no attention to my attempts to get him back by warning him that he would surely be punished. Nor would he repent his irreligious ways even after he got caught and Father had punished him—for

my father, though he favored Esau, was fearful of raising a godless son.

But Esau was not worried. "You would do it yourself if you were not afraid," he would say to me, which wasn't quite true.

For there were times when the music, the chanting, the poetry, the awesome atmosphere of the approach to divinity were profoundly exciting and inspiring:

*Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
O Lord my God, thou art very great;  
Thou art clothed with honour and majesty:  
Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment;  
Who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain;  
Who layest the beams of his chambers in the waters;  
Who maketh the clouds his chariot;  
Who walketh upon the wings of the wind;  
Who maketh winds his messengers;  
His ministers a flaming fire.*

With glory in his face, uplifted in faith and song—then Father looked great and awesome. We sang aloud, and there would come a tingling in my skin, my spine, the top of my head; my heart beat so that I could hardly breathe; my legs trembled; tears came to my eyes.

But Esau, I could see, was not singing; Esau was not moved by the music, nor by the glory of the Lord, nor was he in any way concerned about it. Esau was fumbling in his pocket with the top he had hidden there against my father's expressed command; and when I looked again Esau was not there but had slipped away; he could be seen, indeed, through a window, out among the birds in the courtyard, already engaged in a competition of top-spinning with other Esaus, their piercing, fighting shouts

rising above our psalm-singing so that Father's angry eyes would soon find them.

"You would do it yourself if you weren't afraid," Esau would say afterwards—which, as I have said, was not quite true, although there were times when deep down I envied him his fearless independence, his willingness to risk punishment for the immediate gratification of his inmost desires. It must be, I thought, that Esau is less sensitive than I, that he does not feel, does not suffer as I do—though he howled hard enough when he was punished. Certainly he was not touched as I was by this matter of the creator and religion—whether on a windy flower-strewn hilltop in spring (where he would be watching for rabbits), or at services (where his thoughts were on his top)—any more than you, my son, were concerned about such matters when you first sat in sunlight, crowing delightedly in the discovery of the shadows your pudgy hand and curly head cast on a whitewashed wall.

It must be that the rugged Esaus preserve, even as they grow up, something of that feeling of security in the world which a well-protected infant gets; so that in some respects they seem childish to us Jacobs. The ruggedness of their bodies guards them from doubt of their own powers, gives them the sense of living in a world designed for their gratification. Why then should they think of God? Religious and moral sanctions are only a nuisance to them; inventions of the frail, the nervous, the helpless, they think. Certainly I will admit, my son, that a sense of insecurity is helpful for the development of a religious spirit, and I suspect that had my father been a more successful and eminent man he might possibly have been less pious; but then, on the other hand, there is the case of his father Abraham, whom I am hoping you will,

in effect if not in method, emulate—a capable and highly successful man who was not only very much concerned with his God but was evidently well able to deal with him too. There is, for example, that quaintly told story of how Abraham beat the Lord down from fifty to ten as the minimum of righteous men required to save the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Read for yourself, if you have not already done so, how your great-grandfather, who, according to my mother's vision of the story of the sacrifice, was later to teach man mercy, undertook first to teach God mercy, began by asking, *Wilt thou consume the righteous with the wicked?* and wheedled him into saying, *I will not destroy it for the ten's sake*, before he let the Lord go his way.

As for myself, I can honestly say this: There have been marked changes in my feeling about the creator of our universe and my attitude toward him from time to time in my life. In my boyhood at home, at the time I have just been speaking of, it was one of deep wonder and awesome reverence, tinged perhaps just a little with a bit of fear, a feeling inspired perhaps, as Esau suggested, by my father. And when I left home, in my young manhood, moved not a little by that deeply curious and avid wonder about God's universe, the sense of man's insecurity in this wide world which that journey evoked set me at times along the way to considering, with not a little fear in my heart—a fear now in no way related to my father—what might really be the relationship of man to God. You see, my son, how paradoxical it is that two diametrically opposed motives lead man toward the consideration of his creator—curiosity and fear, aspiration and anxiety. The Esaus, so long as they are possessed neither of curiosity nor fear, do not worry about God.

But the Jacobs, so long as they feel keenly the wonder and precariousness of life on this earth as well as a consciousness of the limits of their powers, continue to be concerned about God—even when in their bafflement they are wont most vehemently to deny him. And that concern is very apt, I warn you, to lead to bafflement and even to confusion.

Thinking of this on my journey to Haran, I recalled that old old story I had got from my mother, that story of the Tower of Babel, which children have heard from their parents from time immemorial, and which I hope you will tell your children just as it was told to me. For the older I got and the more I saw of life, the more meaning that parable had for me; but the primary significance of it seems to be that the creator of this world jealously guards his mysteries and that man's aspiration and attempts to reach and to know his creator are likely very often to end in bafflement and confusion.

Yet do men persist in this aspiration—especially the Jacobs among men. We strive, we climb heavenward, we think by learning to open a little the gates of God, hoping to know him, hoping at least to approach, if not to achieve, something of his omniscient, omnipotent divinity. Is it because at heart we feel our human frailty as no Esau does? Our psalms and our proverbs are full of this aspiration:

*Who hath ascended up into heaven and descended?*

*Who hath gathered the wind in his fists?*

*Who hath bound the waters in his garment?*

*Who hath established all the ends of the earth?*

And our dreams too are full of it:

One night on the way to Haran, walking from Beersheba I got lost and came to a certain place and stayed

there all night because the sun had set while I sat meditating on a heap of stones by the roadside, thinking of the past and wondering what was in store for me. So I took one of the stones and put it under my head and lay down right there to sleep. And I dreamed: and there was a ladder set up on the earth and the top of it reached to heaven, and there were the angels of God ascending and descending. And the Lord stood above it and said in the manner of my father's speech: *I am the Lord, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac*; and he promised me great things—that my seed should be as the dust of the earth, spreading abroad to the four corners of the earth; that in me and my seed all the families of the earth should be blessed. *And behold, I am with thee*, he said, and promised to keep me wherever I went.

Nevertheless when I woke from sleep I was frightened, and the stone on which I had rested my head seemed like God's house; and I made a vow on it saying, *If God will be with me and keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothes to wear, so that I shall come again to my father's house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God*. I even promised him a tenth of whatever he gave me.

You will note that I had not asked for much. My wants in those days were pretty simple, I thought; not at all on the scale of my father's blessing or the promise of God in my dream: food, raiment and some security were all I needed then for the life of the spirit I saw ahead of me. You will note also that for all my adventurousness I wanted to make sure that I would return safely in the end to my father's house; for even when man is most daring he is inwardly fearful. And finally you will note that though in my dream it was the God of my fathers

who spoke to me, yet when I woke I made it clear that only if he proved of service to me would he be my God—that unlike my father, I was not willing merely to accept the God of my forebears but that, in accordance with the counsel of my mother, I was setting forth on this journey to find my God—among other things. After that dream and their waking I went on my way with a great reassurance, with a profound feeling of inevitable success.

Now all that will doubtless seem to you naïve. How silly, you may say, to offer my God a tithe after he had practically promised me the earth! And I still find it a little difficult to know how we can repay God for what we get—a question I think we might well give up worrying about—but I was young then, alone in the world, and though I had thought a good deal about God this was the first time I had ever really got in touch with him, so to speak. True, it was only in a dream—the figment of my wishful imagination, you will doubtless say. That ladder to heaven, you may say, was not unlike the tower those ambitious people of Babel tried to build; but in my dream I could make it reach heaven and get my God to give or at least to promise me what I wished for. All the same, you may say, it was nothing but a dream. Nevertheless, and though it remains to be seen if all the promise of my dream will yet be accomplished, I may say that some of it has come to pass. And I charge you, my son, to look to your dreams, waking or sleeping, and strange as they may seem.

*In a dream, in a vision of the night,  
When deep sleep falleth upon men,  
In slumberings upon the bed,  
Then he openeth the ears of men,  
And sealeth their instruction.*



my father used to quote from that long unhappy poem which my mother said was "a waste of breath." And I must admit that the next two lines seem to bear her out:

*That he may withdraw man from his purpose,  
And hide pride from man.*

For the dreams of men are generally as full of their proud purposes as was my dream on the way to Haran, whereafter I felt sure that great things, a great destiny, awaited me; although I also remembered an old saying of my mother's:

*Dreams give wings to fools.  
Dreams have led men astray;  
And they have failed by putting their hope in them.*

And here is another case where, as I think I have already said, it is not easy to know what precept to follow.

But it may well be, my son, that in your time men will no longer even dream of God, that you will have achieved so much of his powers and wisdom that you will no longer be aware of his presence, and that in times to come men will speak and act entirely on their own authority with no thought whatsoever of the laws of their creator.

It may well be so. For it seems that since ancient days the nature and habits of the creator have been changing, that he has been withdrawing, has become less and less evident to his creatures. I remember how vividly he appeared in those stories my father used to tell of the beginning of the world; how, though he had made heaven and earth, the sun, moon and stars, fish in the sea and fowl in the air, cattle and creeping things, and man himself, the Lord God went about like any one of us, *walking in the garden in the cool of the day*, as the story went; and

how there Adam, *the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. And the Lord God called to the man and said, Where are you?* very much as I have called to you, my son, when as a child you would wander off, and by your stillness I guessed you were up to some mischief in a corner. I have told you how God later came down from heaven to confound the builders of the Tower of Babel; and again and again in the tales of those ancient times we are told how God came down to confront men with their wrong-doing, or to guide them; even to the time of my grandfather, Abraham—though my mother, as I have told you, was inclined to be skeptical about God's having spoken directly to Abraham on the occasion of the sacrifice.

Be that as it may, even in my own time it is pretty generally becoming a matter of agreement that God no longer comes down from heaven to appear before men and to speak to them, as man to man; and anyone who says he has seen or spoken with God is looked at with a good deal of suspicion. Yet God does frequently appear in our thoughts and our dreams, and most of humankind still have a deep and abiding faith in him despite his withdrawal into intangibility, into invisibility and silence.

In this connection I remember the morning after that dream at Bethel (as I had ceremoniously named the place), when I went on, having found the road to Haran, and I came upon a flock of sheep grazing in a sloping meadow. It was a pleasant sight and I stopped to look at them. The round warming sun, just risen above the hill, gilded their woolly white backs as they drifted down the dewy green slope, cropping the tender grass. And then the shepherd came over the brow of the hill, sing-

ing. In his long patched cloak the man stood up against the blue sky, his worn and weathered face turned to the rosy clouds drifting in the east as he sang:

*The Lord is my shepherd;  
I shall not want.*

*He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;  
He leadeth me beside the still waters.  
He restoreth my soul:  
He guideth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's  
sake.*

*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of  
death,  
I will fear no evil;  
For thou art with me:  
Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.*

*Thou preparest a table before me  
In the presence of mine enemies:  
Thou hast anointed my head with oil;  
My cup runneth over.*

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my  
life;  
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

And remembering how, after I woke, having lacked faith even in the promise of the God of my own dream, I had made a vow, a contract with him, I deplored the lack of that faith which this simple man possessed. But I may as well be honest—of such blind faith men in my time have seemed for the most part less and less capable. Either like Esau, my brother, they have ignored God—he has entered neither their thoughts nor their dreams—

or like myself they have thought and dreamed about and questioned God, but they have said, prove yourself, O Lord, and guide me and I shall repay you. At any rate in these times we think we are learning to distinguish between a faith and a wish. Of folk like that faithful shepherd we say, it is because he wants a shepherd himself he believes his God is that.

There have been troubled times in my life when I wished I could find in myself just such faith as that shepherd's, or even that I might return to the naïve optimism of that youth on the road to Haran. I haven't the nerve any more to try to make contracts with God. I know better now. I have learned since then that the creator of our world long ago laid down his contract with us in the laws of his creation; and that our freedom lies in our will and ability to learn those laws and in our decision to abide by them or to flout them. Thus it is that true freedom and true faith are achieved only with true knowledge.

Yet, for all my youthful ignorance, at that time, on the way to Haran, I had no wish to give myself over to the safekeeping of God any more than I wished to return to the arms of those parents whom I had left. That feeling you will understand, my son, when the time comes for you to leave home; you too will surely take pleasure in your first freedom, no matter how unhappy, even fearful, the parting may be. And that youthful and arrogant freedom wants no shepherd; it looks to the creator of its world as aspiration and ally; and takes this relationship for granted much as a child does that of its devoted parents.

And what, I wonder now, will you, my son, and your sons' sons make of this God of ours of whom we are

told that, having created man, *he saw everything that he had made and behold, it was very good*, yet, since that day, has been retreating from the eager faces, from the fearful and hungry hearts of mankind, which has plagued him so that one time, we are told, *it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth and it grieved him at his heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man, whom I have created, from the face of the ground; both man and beast and creeping thing, and the fowl of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.*

How the creator of our world then sent the Flood you will have heard, but mark you that he did not destroy mankind. Few have the heart utterly to destroy their creations no matter how disappointing they may prove to be. Nor was that the first time God went back on his own threat; for we are told that Adam and Eve were warned that they would surely die if they ate of the tree in the middle of their garden; yet here we still are, each generation dealing with God in its own way. Perhaps yours, if it does not manage to climb into heaven as the men of Babel tried, perhaps yours (it is not inconceivable) with your increasingly greater 'wisdom' will have contrived to bring your God down completely into yourselves, into your minds and hearts, so that you need no longer deal with him at all—so that he will indeed be as he promised me in my dream, when he said, *Behold, I am with thee.*

But who am I to be saying how you will deal with your God? What I set out to tell you was how I dealt with mine on the road to Haran and how he dealt with me when I got there.

Much of what I saw and did on that long journey I have not recounted although I have already said a good

deal about it, and you may think me at fault in not sticking to the point of my tale, you may say I have wandered more in my mind than on that road. But the road from Beersheba is still there; nothing on earth is so lasting as the roads we make; and you may, if you wish, retrace my steps, seeing and doing all that I saw and did. But of what I felt and thought on the way you can have no knowledge without my telling you; which is what I have done here.

*...And Laban had two daughters...*

YOUNG men (you will doubtless bear me out in time) are apt to dream even more of women than of God. I mean, of course, young men such as I was. I don't know what my brother Esau dreamed about—if anything. You had the feeling with him that you have with young children—that they do not have dreams because they never mention them, even when they wake with a cry in the night as from a nightmare. Esau was not given to talking about dreams, and I doubt if he dreamed any more about women than he did about God—which I imagine was not at all—inasmuch as he was quite satisfied with those rude ruddy Hittite women whom he was busy chasing most of the time when he was not hunting.

Since they were not to my taste, it was not of those buxom red-haired maidens that I dreamed. On the other hand, though I loved my little dark-eyed mother, the maidens, or better said—since they were all of a pattern—the maiden in my dreams did not resemble her. She was unlike any of the girls I had seen: neither dark nor ruddy,

but golden; neither buxom nor small-boned, but slenderly, gracefully rounded. She was beautiful.

My father used to sing at the end of the song *To a Virtuous Woman*:

*Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain:*

*But a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.*

But there was nothing in my dreams to tell me if this girl feared God, only that she was well-favored and lovely. And though I was sometimes tempted by the desire of the flesh toward women I met on the road to Haran, they were so unlike the maiden of my dreams that I disdained them. I have always had a dislike for compromise; I have always tended to hold out for perfection, for the ideal. And I had dreamed of my ideal so often, especially since I set out from Canaan with the idea in mind of finding myself a mate, that when I saw her coming toward me at the end of that long journey to Haran it seemed to me that I must still be dreaming.

And now after these many years that meeting seems indeed much like one of those many desirous dreams of my youth. It was like a wishful variant of that story my mother once told me of how my grandfather's servant had come and found her. For I came to a well in a field, and three flocks of sheep lay there by it, and a great stone lay on the mouth of the well. And I said to the shepherds gathered there, Are you from Haran? And they said, Yes. And I said, Do you know Laban? And they said, We know him, and look, there comes his daughter, Rachel. And there as I spoke with them came Rachel with her father's sheep, and she was the maiden of my dreams, golden and slender, and gracefully rounded. And I rolled the great stone from the mouth of the well, and watched her with



fast-beating heart as I watered her flock, and saw that she was indeed my heart's desire from her golden head to her sandaled feet. Standing in sunlight, the light shining on her fair face and hair, she was radiant. She looked at me and smiled in all innocence, her blue eyes bright with beauty. So I kissed Rachel and told her I was Rebekah's son; and she ran and told her father.

And Laban came and took me in.

And Laban had two daughters, of whom lovely Rachel was the younger. The name of the elder was Leah. Leah was a little like my mother, small-boned, and dark-haired, and her eyes were dark, but there was something wrong with them.

I loved the fair Rachel at sight, and I said to Laban, I will serve you seven years for Rachel, your younger daughter. And Laban said, it is better that I give her to you, than that I should give her to another man. Stay with me. And I served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed but a few days because of the love I had for her.

Then I said to Laban, Give me my woman, for I have served my time; and Laban gathered all the men and made a feast; and in the evening when, after those years of abstinence, I was inflamed with lust by all the male talk and the feasting, he brought me the woman I longed for. But when I woke in the morning it was not Rachel I discovered but Leah I had had.

Does this seem to you too brief a telling of the joys and sorrows of some seven years of my life? Then let me confess, my son, that just so brief, just so fleeting and dream-like does much of life become in retrospect—the happy parts like wishful dreams, the unhappy parts like fearful nightmares. There are times now when it would be difficult for me to swear that it was actually lovely Rachel

I saw at the well, and not a waking illusion out of my youthful dreaming; when it would be difficult for me to swear that Laban had tricked me—had ever promised the lovely Rachel. I might only have dreamed that too, most wishfully. Indeed there are times now when, were it not for your presence, I could doubt that Rachel ever existed other than in the desirous dreams and imaginings of that eager young Jacob who is also no more.

Does he seem to you too much of a dreamer—this young Jacob—too much given up to his dreaming? Then remember that a dream is a hunger; and every man has his own hunger and will pay dearly for it. Years later my brother, Esau, who when he was hungry had sold me his birthright for a mess of pottage, laughed at me for having been willing to give seven years of hard work for a certain woman. "I always told you they were all alike," he said, "and you proved it. You couldn't tell her sister from her in the dark." Nevertheless I think Esau was wrong.

Yet now when I consider Laban's deception it no longer seems so heinous a thing that with his aid my hungry body had been tricked into this compromise before I got my ideal, as it was then when I upbraided him that morning, crying, "What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve you for Rachel, my heart's desire? Why then have you deceived me?"—and called him every evil thing I could think of until he cut me short by saying it was only just, reminding me how I had deceived my own father, and went on to say something not unlike what my mother had said in that connection:

"A deception," said Laban, "is sometimes needed when a man cannot be persuaded otherwise to do what is best. And this," he said, "is best for all concerned. It is best for

Leah who loves you and would otherwise not have had this fulfilment and pleasure. Is it Leah's fault that she is not young and pretty, that she is one of those women who are not a man's 'heart's desire,' " he mimicked my way of speaking the phrase, "but whom men will take only to ease their lust? And would it be right for men to be allowed to take only the young and pretty ones and leave their elder, less-favored sisters untouched? We don't do that here in Haran; we don't give the younger before the elder. And anyway, who are you that you should get your 'heart's desire' so easily—the very first time? Most men, let me tell you, don't ever get their 'heart's desire'; many of us don't even get a look at her. Count yourself lucky, my lad, that you still have a chance. And how do you know Rachel is really your 'heart's desire'? I'll wager there will come a time after you've got her when you won't be quite so sure."

"When you love a woman as I love Rachel," I said fervently, "you are sure."

Laban laughed indulgently. "Rachel is my daughter and I love her too," he said. "But let me tell you this, my lad. A man's 'heart's desire' is not forever one and the same thing—a man may in the course of his life want many things. Sometimes he thinks he knows what he wants; and sometimes he does not want a thing only because he does not yet know it. Don't be romantic, Jacob. Beauty is very nice. But all men know what beauty in a woman is for: it's to draw a man's flesh; and wise men properly suspect it. My Rachel is a mighty pretty piece, I admit. But Leah is a better woman than Rachel. Take my word for it. Women like Leah are a help to a man; they give him everything the pretty ones do, and they don't distract him or interfere with his work."

"Rachel hasn't distracted me," I said. "These seven years the prospect of having her has spurred me on to work for you as nothing else would. I have given you more than we bargained for and you have deceived me for my pains."

"I was talking about what Rachel will do to you when you have got her," said Laban. "Now stop complaining; stop talking about deception. Get what you can from the woman you've got; but serve me another seven years and you shall have your 'heart's desire.' Take it from me that even when a man marries just once he is really getting at least two and sometimes three women. By the time she has had a couple of kids the woman he married will be gone; and he'll be ready to swear it isn't the same one. You just wait and see if it isn't so."

Impatient with his advice I asked him if Rachel still wanted me.

"Does she still want you? Do you think your having had someone else would deter a woman? Rachel is crazy about you. Both of them are. You're the finicky type that doesn't have to chase women; they fall for you; though why they fall for the gentle men and make the rounders, like I used to be, run after them I have never figured out. I guess it's because you want what you call their souls as well as their bodies, and they know very well just what it is we want. And come now, admit that for the fever you were in last night, any woman would have sufficed. It really need not have been Rachel. I know what that was like. I've been there. You didn't miss Rachel, did you, now? All the same, believe me, Rachel, the young virgin, will be thankful for the experience you've had with the older one, and you will be too."

I hate to admit it, but he was right.

Laban was in spirit a good deal like Esau, my brother, but more vulgar, and shrewder. Of course I had to do what he said. You are in the power of the man who knows he has what you want; as I had myself learned when Esau wanted my pottage. So I said I would serve Laban another seven years and he gave me Rachel, my heart's desire; and because of Leah, who was to me as the women most men take before they have found their heart's desire, my coming to Rachel was not the feverish fumbling in the darkness it had been, I must confess, with Leah, but such a play, an excitement and ecstasy of the body and spirit together as God himself might have envied.

I hate to admit it: Deceived I had been by Laban, but it was best for all concerned. He was absolutely right.

... *And Laban said* ...

YES, LABAN was right; and I don't mind saying to you now that it is perhaps best for a man to begin with a woman he doesn't love; for I should have been sorry to come to Rachel in the fumbling, lust-driven way I went to Leah. As it was, my coming to Rachel was perfect. Love was not confused, muddled and overcome by the too desirous and still ignorant flesh, but was added to lust like a crown, infusing it like a light, raising it from sensuous satisfaction to the most glorious gift of life. And for this I was indebted to Laban's deception.

Not that I imagine he saw what he had done in the light in which I saw it. For Laban certainly had none of my young eagerness to find in all of life true emotion and meaning. Laban and I were as different in spirit as Esau and I. Laban said I was romantic when I said I looked for something more in a woman than a gratification no more profound and lasting than that of eating and an act whose function was no more significant than that of any other creature propagating its kind.

Laban, when we talked about women—when I used to ask his advice about the way a man should behave with a woman—Laban used to scoff at me, very much like Esau, for what he called my romanticism. “You want to make too much of that little business of fornication,” he said. And talking to Laban I realized that two men, standing side by side and considering the same object, were frequently—because of the difference of their natures—incapable of seeing and feeling the same thing. What I could not possibly make Laban see, any more than I could Esau, was that what was the simple satisfaction of an appetite for the one and a particularly delectable kind of hunting for the other, was something much more important to a man like me, because in its ecstasy comes the only time when the thoughtful man of sensibility really loses himself—feels himself at one with thoughtless nature—a unity which men of more animal-like spirits, men closer to nature, need not strive for. When I tried to tell Laban this he looked confused, and shook his head.

My father-in-law was a paunchy, pleasant-looking man, bald, with a sparse, reddish grey fringe of hair; he was brown-eyed and florid. He was not at all like my mother, yet there were times when he reminded me of my brother, Esau. It was as if Esau had got through our mother something from her family which had not been apparent in herself.

Though he was now soft and flabby, you could see in Laban’s massive shoulders and thighs that he had been a powerful young man. And if he did little running and jumping himself he had a way of getting others to run and jump for him. This he apparently learned in the towns where he had lived and traded, and where great numbers of men are to be found laboring constantly un-

der the will of others. There Laban had learned what seemed to be the central principle of his life—that, more powerful than anything else, better than a birthright or a blessing it is to hold in your hands what another man wants and needs for the life of his body and spirit. This I myself had discovered, as I have said, when my brother Esau gave me his birthright for a mess of pottage, nevertheless since then to this day I have lacked the desire to hold sway over others, to exact from others evidence of my power over them. Perhaps that is so because I have generally lacked the actual power of Laban and of Esau to take from others. But I, on the other hand, have got a great sense of power not in taking from others but in giving to others—especially in giving to others something I could create. Thus, had my brother Esau said that day at the brook, “That is a fine bridge you have made,” I should gladly have given it to him and should have got from that gift much more satisfaction than I took in the forced sale of his birthright to me. But to men like Esau and Laban such satisfaction—the satisfaction from some innate superiority—is incomprehensible; they know only the satisfaction of the supremacy which comes from power over others. I shall never forget the look in Laban’s eyes when I promised him another seven years of labor for Rachel’s hand. It was exactly like Esau’s look when he used to pin me down and get me to admit he was the stronger. Laban was, of course, much more civilized and sophisticated than my brother; being a townsman, Laban called Esau a crude backwoods man, but they were not unlike in some ways. What brute strength was to Esau, trickery was to Laban; where Esau said, I take what I want by force, Laban said, I take what I want by craft. On the way to Haran, when I thought uncomfortably of



how I had tricked my own father and brother, I used to comfort myself with the thought that the Jacobs, the frailer men of sensibility, needs must resort sometimes to trickery as to a weapon for their survival. But when I came to Laban I saw that there were men for whom trickery was the customary procedure in all their business; it had only to be profitable to be justifiable.

Yet Laban was a kind man. To be sure, he got the greatest satisfaction from putting over a tricky deal, like palming off Leah on me, but he was sincerely and deeply concerned for Leah's welfare, and his feeling for his daughters was not influenced by the consideration of beauty as mine undeniably was. Laban seemed to me peculiarly lacking in a sense of beauty or, for that matter, in any other spiritual excitement.

And, though Laban knew a good deal about the world, he was not overly concerned about the nature of its creator. But he was not, like Esau, entirely unmindful of that question; he had set up in his house the most reputable gods he could find and saw to it that they were properly worshipped by his household and the many employees on his estate. From this divine service he derived a great sense of security although it was all quite formal and entirely uninspired. When I tried to question him about the nature of his faith he would not discuss it except very generally. "Religion, like marriage," he would say, "is a good thing. Religious men and married men make better workers." He meant, of course, better for him—more profitable. Anything that brought Laban wealth was good.

For wealth meant to Laban what strength meant to Esau, that is, security; and though there were times when I envied Laban his ability to acquire wealth, I more often

disliked in him that single-minded unscrupulous devotion to the accumulation of property far beyond his needs. When I came to Laban it was not wealth but life I was looking for, and you will recall how modest were my demands in that compact with the Lord which I made on the way. I must admit that by the time I left Haran Laban and marriage had made me see the matter in a somewhat different light; and that it was from this man whose character and spirit seemed to me in most ways anything but admirable, in every way different from what I was or wanted to be—it was from Laban that I learned far more about life than my own father, with all his meditation and poetry, had ever taught me. For it was Laban who led me out of my idealistic dreams into the equivocal realities of life itself and taught me to deal with them according to my lights. So I am not deceiving myself as to the value of this tale with its commentaries on my life. Nor have I any wish to deceive you into thinking this will save you the pains of learning life for yourself.

In the arguments between my parents which followed the deception of my father, my mother repeatedly made this point: "Children are sometimes forced to deceive their parents if they are to get on in this world . . . It is always wrong only for a parent to deceive a child. That is harmful."

No, I do not intend to deceive you. I shall not, for example, try to deceive you as Laban did me, when I remonstrated with him for giving me Leah instead of the promised Rachel and he answered that because I had deceived my father I too must be deceived. People will try to tell you, too, that there is such a pattern in life—they call it getting your just deserts. But there is little truth

in it. No accounts are kept and balanced. Laban's deception of me had nothing to do with my deception of my father. Even those who have not deceived get deceived. Deception goes on all the time; you will be deceived by men and by nature; disillusion like conflict is part of the learning of life. You will in turn learn life from the Esaus with whom you will struggle and from the Labans who will certainly deceive you, and not really from your father who offers you his vision so that in the light of it you may perhaps see the life you learn more clearly, with more understanding. For the knowledge and the understanding of life do not always go together. The Esaus and the Labans are not given to explaining the life they teach you. They are themselves so often inexplicable.

Laban, for example, though an affable man, ruled his household and his estate with an iron hand. In business dealings he was often blustering and arrogant. With a workman who displeased him he might be merciless; in anger he was quick and violent. But with his wife who was a foolish and light-minded gabbler his patience and forbearance were endless, though not a day passed when she did not do or say something to irritate him. With incredible calm he would listen to her tiresome tirades and then pat her hand or even kiss her when it seemed to me that, were I her husband, I should have beaten her. And only once did I hear him express anything like the annoyance she must have caused him. She had interrupted our business with a long and pointless account of some difficulty she had had buying a certain cloak. I could barely contain myself to the end of it, but Laban sent her off with a smile. Then, looking after her, he said, very gently, "You would never think, would you, that she was a shy quiet girl when I met her? You never can tell how they will turn out, can

you?" He gave me a curiously fraternal look, and then went on with our business. She was his second wife. His first wife, the mother of Rachel and Leah, was her sister; she died when Rachel was born.

"Rachel is so much like her mother, that I hated to part with her," said Laban to me one day. "That's really why I gave you Leah." He said it as if in a joke, but I suspected there was some truth in it; and I suspected too that he had loved Rachel's mother very much and had married her sister expecting her to be the same. And then the disquieting thought came to me that my Rachel might change some day and grow to be like her mother's sister. But that was incredible. What was more troublesome to me was the fact that in Rachel's lovely face there were faint traces of the features of her father, those features which in his face were shrewd and vulgar. Her fairness was like a refinement of his faded ruddiness. And yet it was difficult to believe that anything so comely and tender as Rachel could have come from a man as gross as her father; for when I looked at Rachel alone I knew that she was the perfection of which I had dreamed and that life with her would be perfect.

Laban had given Leah a handmaiden, Zilpah; and when he gave me Rachel he also gave her a handmaiden, Bilhah, and on that occasion he remarked that he hoped I had enough women to satisfy me for a while. When I protested, saying that now that I had Rachel I would want no other woman, he was amused and said, "You will get over that, my boy. And then you will get over attaching all that spiritual exaltation to the little business of love." His paunch shook with laughter.

But more than his cynical grossness, it was Laban's greediness I disliked. When I first came to him I was de-

ceived by his personal air of substantial ease and generous optimism. But it was not long before I saw that despite his quite comfortable financial position nothing on earth was so important to Laban as the incessant accumulation of his money and property, which he was constantly striving to enhance by that shrewd and sharp dealing, that trickery which is considered good business. Good business was the preoccupation of Laban's existence. And with youthful self-confidence and ambition, while I was yet insecure, uneasy and unanchored, I looked rather contemptuously on the greedy conservatism of so well-established a man of means. To me, Laban's insatiable and unscrupulous greed was ugly and inexplicable. To increase his gains he was as willing to take advantage of any stranger as Esau would be to knock him down. "In business," said Laban, "it is every man for himself." To me it looked more like "Dog eat dog." He ground his workers unmercifully, even for a few cents more profit which meant little to him and much to them. Why? It would have been as difficult for him as for me to explain. As difficult as it would have been for me to learn from you, my son, when you sat crowing on the floor with your toys beside you, why you must have that one bright far-off toy for which you so desperately reached.

"Every man has his chance in this world," Laban would say. "I was poor once, too." But that made no more sense, it explained no more than did your infant crowing over the toy you had grasped; until one day, after refusing a plea from his laborers for higher wages Laban repeated, "I was poor once, too"; and then went on to tell me how poverty had irked him in his youth, how envious he had been of the wealthy, and of their ability to go about the world taking whatever they wished—like my well-to-do

grandfather Abraham, he said, sending his servant to Haran to find a suitable wife for his son. When Laban saw the style in which Abraham's emissary traveled, when he saw the jewels his sister Rebekah was given before she went to marry Isaac, he resolved that wealth would be the achievement of his life—that he too would get wealth. He wanted servants; he wanted such jewels for his own wife. He wanted the ease and security money brought.

So he set to work, without stint or scruple, intent on making money; and he did.

"But," said Laban sadly, "not in time to save the life of my sickly wife or to get something done for Leah's weak eyes." However, young Rachel had profited by his success. "Of course her mother was pretty," said Laban, "but much of that beauty, that perfection you are so much taken with, Jacob, is the result of the sort of care Rachel has had which only money can buy."

*... And he went in also unto Rachel,  
and he loved also Rachel more than  
Leah...*

IT IS INDEED a novel experience for a young man: that first time he wakes and opens his eyes to see by the bedside, on a stool, or more likely on the floor, a heap of discarded garments—not merely his own, but those familiar ones mingled with the clothes of a woman. It gives him a new, a curiously fresh satisfaction. And yet when he turns to look at her sleeping face he is indeed fortunate if she does not appear utterly strange to him—this woman to whom his desire had seemed to bring him closer than he had ever been to any other being in the world—who had seemed indeed in the night to have made him one with her.

Many a man will admit to having looked, that first morning, with something close to dismay on the strangely withdrawn though familiar face he discovers beside him; with the feeling that he has been tricked by nature. So that, as I see it now, that morning when, tricked by Laban, I woke and looked upon the face of Leah instead of the woman whom for seven laborious years I had dreamed of having, I was not extraordinarily put upon.

That is, I say, as I see it now. Then, as I have said, I was very unhappy, I was outraged, and complained bitterly that the woman I had got was not the woman I had dreamed of. But since then my own experience and observation of other men have made me see it rather differently—other men have made me see that nature itself is generally as tricky as was my father-in-law; and if a man does not see this the first morning he will in most marriages have seen it by the end of a week, a month, six months, a year or three years—some time he will know that he did not know at all whom he had married. And as I see it now it was absurd of me to complain of Laban's trickery, as absurd as it is to complain of what nature, that capriciously or cannily wilful possessor and dispenser of both our good and bad fortune, sees fit to do. Complain as I might, I couldn't really blame Laban any more than one can blame nature. And as Laban then pointed out, of all men I truly had least cause for complaint since in the long run I got what I wanted, or thought I had wanted.

As for Leah—who could blame her for being less than one's dream? And curious it is that though Leah was not the maiden of my dreams, it was for my dreaming, as she later told me, for my uncompromising aspirations that she loved me. If anyone had a just complaint it was Leah. Well might she have complained—of fate, of nature, or of Laban, her father—that she had been denied the gifts they might as justly have bestowed upon her as upon Rachel. But Leah never complained. Women—being more realistic and less romantic—are less given to complaining about nature's injustices than are men. Leah made no demands on me for more than I could freely give her, and she gave me eagerly and generously the simple satisfaction she knew she could give me. I asked for no traffic with her



spirit—with Leah I did not long to merge my very soul as I did with Rachel's—indeed I looked for and perceived no spirit at all in Leah. I took from her only her body, which made up in passion what it lacked in grace; and she seemed content, she seemed happy enough with that, and, seeing that I wanted no more, Leah offered no more, and busily bearing child after child she seemed unconcerned about the spirit, for which, truth to tell, she had little enough time.

Since you may well ask at this point why, despite my protestations to Laban, I still went to Leah after I had got Rachel, my heart's desire, let me try to make that clear though it is not easy to do so since the reason is not simple or singular. In the first place, it is a curious fact that a virgin appetite is more easily restrained—especially in the high-minded—than one which has tasted satisfaction. I cannot explain this; I can only tell you that it is so; that it was actually easier to refrain from those Hittite women before I met Rachel, than it would have been to foreswear Leah, and Bilhah and Zilpah, after I knew her. And I do not mean to excuse myself when I say that it is easier for a virgin male than another to put aside a woman who wants his love since he has yet no knowledge of the strength of a woman's desire and need for love. And finally there is beside his gratification a man's strong need to reassure himself not only of his potency but of his fertility, a need which is probably greater in men of sensibility than in their ruder brothers; although sometimes I have thought that many men would be less hateful and violent otherwise, if in love they were more potent and fertile. My brother Esau, for all his woman-hunting had only five sons. I had twelve. But for a long time Rachel, my heart's desire, was barren; and, having come as Laban

predicted, to look upon the business of love somewhat differently, I went to Leah, and to Bilhah and Zilpah too, as most men go to women they do not love, bringing only their lust, carelessly casting their seed, until they conceive with the loved one those children they will cherish as the heirs of their spirit, to replace themselves in time.

The children of Leah were born and raised for the most part out of my sight. Leah was capable, competent and independent, and as a matter of course she took upon herself without question whatever burden or responsibility of womanhood presented itself. And in her passion for serving a man's body and bearing the fruit of his seed Leah let spoil what hidden beauty she had had—the simple bodily beauty of all young women. Breasts, belly and buttocks grew heavy and sagged, as, one after another, she bore those robust if unbeautiful sons who had little of my looks or spirit. Though Leah herself, except for her homeliness, hardly resembled her father, her sons were of the breed of Laban, ruddy and rugged, and much like my brother Esau in body and mind. Certainly they bore little resemblance to me; perhaps, as she later explained it, because it was not with love that I conceived them. And certainly it was not with love that I went to Leah, whom I approached the first time with blind and blundering greed and thereafter with uninspired lust either to prove my potency or from a sense of duty—of sympathy for her need.

How different it was with Rachel, your mother, to whom I went, thanks to Laban and Leah, as the consummate lover, eager not merely for my own gratification but intent on waking her to my passion and teaching her true love. Though what true love is, my son, I cannot yet tell you. What love is like you will hear from the countless

poets and singers of songs who have told and sung of love since time immemorial. Yet why a man's heart goes out with love to one woman and not to another they will not teach you; nor—though I have said that men can find reasons for everything, even for loving—can I yet tell you completely or with any certainty why I loved Rachel, your mother, and not Leah.

True, Rachel was beautiful, radiant and golden, her eyes like stars, like jewels, like sky-blue pools which sunny breezes set sparkling. And Leah's dark eyes were kind but weak; and placid to the point of dullness. Leah was more like the women of Haran, small-boned and quick like my mother, whom I myself resembled and loved. In Rachel it was as if her mother, who must have been much like my mother in spirit, had tempered the animality of Laban to physical graces, to fair refinements of those qualities in my ruddy brother which I used to covet and which I now happily see still more refined in you. So that in my passion for your mother I may—it seems to me now—have been moved by the deep desire to possess and hence to temper those Esau-virtues I myself had enviously lacked.

I do not say it was so, my son, I can only guess it was so. For at the time, I knew only that I loved your mother above all other beings on this earth; that in her arms I thought and could think of no other one; that there alone I could forget everything else in this troubled and delightful life; there all earthly fears, anxieties, hopes, ambitions and aspirations were drowned in the desire to become ecstatically one in body and spirit with this woman I loved; and there alone I became one with all creation.

In the first years of my marriage to Rachel I was the happiest man alive. I used to rise up each morning with a

song of thanksgiving for having had the good fortune to find my heart's desire; I called myself blessed among men. How fortunate among men I was, I knew when I saw how, as Laban so rightly had said, many men, indeed most, spend their lives in the travesty of living with women they do not love, of trying to lavish upon them the favors, attentions, the gifts intended for the ideals they have never found except in their dreams.

How it is in general for women I cannot say, of course, since no man can ever know, even from his experience with them, what it is like to be a woman. Before I married your mother I had the naïve notion that in marriage the beautiful mystery of woman would reveal itself to study as other mysteries men studied were revealed. I have since learned that man may study the mystery of what it is like to be a woman and even penetrate a little this mystery, as he has penetrated to an extent the mysteries of birth and death; but a full revelation of any of these three mysteries man himself will never achieve.

I say this with substantial conviction. In the work I did for Laban, in breeding his cattle, I observed and studied carefully the birth and death of animals, and though I learned many things about the manner and the processes of the beginning of life and of the nature of its end, I am certain that we will never penetrate the ultimate darkness of birth and death, except insofar as each of us experiences them himself, but without being able to recall and recount those experiences. So too with the ultimate mystery of woman. And since, though women are generally said to be talkative, what they say is seldom self-revealing; it is rather in the nature of an accompaniment, often a concealment of their true thoughts and feelings, about which they are really most reticent.

I have often wished that women would tell what it is like to be a woman; a revelation men might well profit by. It is men who have been intent for ages on making of speech a medium for the revelation and communication of the truths they have discovered, not only in the world about them but within themselves—as I am doing here. For the good of our fellow men we write the histories of men and of nations of men, and eagerly and frankly we tell each other and women, from our own experiences, what it is like to be a man. It may well be a romantic, impractical and futile male preoccupation. It is inconceivable to me that any woman would do likewise. At any rate it is unlikely that they will do so since much of their influence over us lies in that very mystery.

I have no doubt that if your mother told the story of her life with me it would have a quite different complexion from this tale. But I cannot even imagine her setting out to do it. Rachel was ever impatient of analysis or discussion. "Are people any better or happier," she would ask, "for all the truths men have been gathering—hoarding and examining them for ages?"

*Of the making of books there is no end*, my mother used to repeat a bit wearily, when she saw my father writing. And I must confess that when I think of the wisdom I have seen shut up in dusty, long-neglected books I can hardly blame her. But of the pleasure, the satisfaction a man might get in this gathering and consideration of truths, Rachel appeared to have no conception. She loved talk, like song, in a gay and festive mood. She enjoyed a good cry over a sad or tragic tale; but like my mother she could not see why a man must concern himself with the unnecessary search and expression of unpleasant truths—especially in song or story.

So when I tell you that we were supremely happy in our first years together I can speak with certainty only of myself. A man, I can tell you, is happiest when he gets what he wants, what he has imagined and dreamed of. But what it is that women dream of getting no man truly knows; and since women do not say what is in their hearts, it appears, at least so far as a man can see, that because they have no great imaginations they have no very specific desires; that there is really no telling, themselves, what will make them happy—or it is that their great happiness comes in the fulfillment not so much of their own dreams as of the dreams of others—of the men they love. For so intent was Rachel, in the beginning, on being everything I wished for, that there were times when I wondered what had become of her own spirit, or whether I had been deceived about her having had one when I met her; and though her devotion to me was flattering there were times when I wished she were less submissive and dependent, more intent on joining her spirit with mine than submerging it in mine; a wish that her father, Laban, when I mentioned it to him, found very funny—it made him laugh out loud.

Rachel's clothing and food, her occupations and diversions, her tastes and her ideas, all seemed dependent then on my wishes and my approval. Because she saw that I loved order she made of my house a place of decorous beauty. She even tried to identify herself with my past, she learned what dishes my mother had cooked for me, and made them; she learned the history and the ways of my people in Canaan and made them hers, ignoring her own past, the background and customs of her own father in Haran. Nothing gave her contentment so much as my

satisfaction, and beyond my satisfaction nothing else seemed to concern her but the wish to bear my child.

We were so perfectly happy that her preoccupation with that wish, her repeated references to it, sometimes irritated me, especially since—in view of Leah's fruitfulness—it was obviously no fault of mine. In moments of depression Rachel would say hysterically, *You must give me children, Jacob, or I shall die*, until in exasperation I would ask her if she thought I was God who had closed her womb. Then it was something of a shock to me that she sent me to Bilhah, her handmaid; whether it was so that I might reassure her or myself of my fertility (which I promptly did in conceiving Dan) I do not know; but that it was for some good practical reason I am now certain, for I learned in time how practical and determined my Rachel could be.

Though I too dreamed of a child in which her ineffable beauty and my aspiring spirit would be united I was happy enough with her as it was. But it was plain how fixed in Rachel's heart was the belief that she would not really and wholly be my woman, would not feel sure she had supplanted Leah and all other women until she had borne me a child after my own heart; and our love-making in those first years was stirred and driven not only by our desire for passionate communion, by our striving for the unity of body and spirit, but by Rachel's almost desperate will to conception and my profound wish to fulfill her will.

The delight, the happiness I got with Rachel in those years surpassed anything I could ever have imagined in my youthful dreams. It was not one of the things I had asked of God in my dream on the way to Haran. And in my unspeakable joy and gratitude I would sometimes ask

myself—who was I among all men to deserve such a gift? And then looking at Rachel would come the question: And what had she done to deserve the gift of her transcendent beauty which her sister had not? And I saw then how nature—like Laban—was not concerned with the justice of reward or deprivation, only with the consummation of its own devices and ends; and Rachel, rousing me to passion with her passion to bear a child, was not merely a woman but all nature, all creation, at work with me, with my eager flesh and spirit.

But Rachel was not preoccupied with such reflections. It was touching to hear her ask Leah questions about childbirth: how much it hurt to have a child, how soon before one's figure returned to normal size and shape. It was touching to see how Rachel, occupied mainly with keeping herself beautiful and satisfying my desires, envied Leah the maternal fullness of her days.

I have told you how with (as she thought) Leah's help (for which, incidentally, she had gone so far as to let Leah have me) Rachel finally became pregnant. And with that event there was a marked change in our relationship, in our love-making, which became no less passionate but more tender. And with that also came a remarkable change in Rachel herself. It was like something I used to observe with awe each year when I was a curious boy, wondering at so many things in nature. By our house stood a great tree, and in the early spring I liked to look up and see its grey web of bare branches faintly starred with tender breaking buds against the still wintry sky. Then one day I would look and behold a thick green tent, a rustling leafy canopy unfurled against the bright sun; and it was summer. Always the realization came with sudden surprise. I



had seen the tree every day, but just when this change actually took place I could not have said.

So it was with Rachel, who was suddenly a full-blown matron, authoritative and assured. And I am sure that when Eve, *the mother of all living*, having eaten of the forbidden fruit, first appeared before Adam all puffed up with her new-found knowledge of good and evil, he was no less disconcerted than I was by the change in your mother. This girl who had depended upon me for decision and direction, whose lack of independent foresight and initiative had troubled me at times, here suddenly, without so much as consulting me, was embarked on a series of plans and works for a creature not yet in sight—whose ultimate arrival she well knew was a matter attended by a good deal of uncertainty.

And it is precisely in such circumstances, it seems to me now, that something of the essential difference between the male and the female spirit reveals itself. The romantic imagination of a man may lead him to believe something will happen of which he has no true knowledge; but if he knows there are odds against a possible event which interests him he will be calculating, go in for it carefully, tentatively, make preparations with reservations depending upon the odds. A woman, because her imagination is not romantic, just will not get interested in anything which has never happened; but if she herself is involved in a possible event she gives it everything, not merely her hope, but her faith, and prepares for it as if it were in fact a certainty. Thus it is that men make the great discoveries and the great failures, while women are the great and reliable conservators. They preserve and nourish the good that has been created. They make sure that what is bound to come will be provided for.

In the second month of her pregnancy Rachel had already determined the rearrangement of our house to provide a place for you; she began the incessant manufacture and accumulation of your diminutive garments; and was daily referring to you (calling you "Becky," to make sure, as I have said, that you would be a boy) as if you had already arrived.

A pregnant woman, like a man absorbed in the development of an idea within himself, becomes so completely self-centered as to appear as selfish as the pettiest spoiled creature intent only on the satisfaction of some small desire; so selfish indeed that it is sometimes as difficult to remember that a pregnant woman is working for the perpetuation of her species as it is to remember that an irritable and demanding man of genius is struggling with some fruitful inspiration. Leah, doubtless just as absorbed in her pregnancies, had kept them from distracting me from my pursuits, which she considered too important to be disturbed. But Rachel's pregnancy became the central concern of my household.

It not only intruded upon my affairs but it engaged my curious interest. Its progress fascinated me. When you, my child, got to stirring in her womb, Rachel would put my hand where I could feel your strange secret movements. And toward the last it was amazing when, sitting and talking to her while she sat peacefully sewing, I would see her suddenly raise her head and, with a grimace between pain and ecstasy, gasp, as kick after kick, plain to be seen, would take her breath; then she would calmly proceed with her work.

But what was most remarkable was the change in our relative positions; a change which had come about without argument or edict, as inexorably and unalterably, as

plainly as does the change from one season of the year to another. From submission and subservience to my tastes and wishes, from complete submergence of her spirit in the service of the desires and needs of my spirit, it was I who became the servitor and Rachel the one whose desires and needs must be served. Not, to be sure, for her selfish satisfaction, but that you, my son, might best be born.

... *And she conceived and bear a son...*

IT APPEARS that after all this talk I have arrived at just about the point where I started my story—at your birth. And it would seem that the pattern of any story of man is bound to be circular since the creator of mankind set the pattern in the beginning when he told Adam: *for dust thou art, and to dust shalt thou return*. But there is, of course, more than one way to tell a story; and even the story of our creation is told in two ways—the first from the point of view of the creator and the second from man's point of view. This story is told, of course, from my point of view; but does it matter which way it is told so long as, by the end of it, all that signifies has been recounted? What matters to me is that I give you here some of those things which are not transmitted in the blood but from mind to mind—that I tell you those things which only a father can tell his son, those things about my life and about your life which you cannot otherwise know. For I am, as I have said, a lover not only of life but of knowledge.

My first year with Rachel and the year after your birth

I still count as the two most memorably happy years of my life—the first because of the delight I took in your mother, and the second because of the delight I found in you. For the first I had been in a measure, if not completely, prepared by my own dreams and by the myriad songs one hears of love. But I was quite unprepared for the second; for few songs are sung—at least a young man is apt to hear very few—about the sheer delight of parenthood; and few parents seem to recall or ever to speak of the pure pleasure, the downright entertainment an infant affords in his frolicking, in his chuckling discovery of playful tricks and excitements, from the first round-eyed “peek-a-boo” or small-fisted “bye-bye,” to putting his curly head down for the first somersault, or lifting his fat legs to scramble upstairs. Although all babies are delightful, you have to have one of your own to learn that; and only from your own will you know how perfectly delightful a baby can be. How delightful you yourself were as a baby you cannot, alas, remember.

I have said how you appeared to me on your arrival. But it was only by the second month when you had taken your place in my life as a permanent and accepted fixture rather than a miraculous and awesome apparition—when the sparse fuzz on your head gave place to fine, pale golden glinting hair, when your red wrinkled face smoothed into pink milk-fed curves, and your blue eyes became not merely bright stars but the staring windows of an inscrutable yet intelligent little spirit, intently watching light and movement—it was only then that you became an unfailing source of amusement and fascination—like an untiring toy, a plaything whose aspect changed from day to day. So that I could hardly tear myself away from your grave or smiling gaze to go to my work; and whenever I

was free I delighted to spend my time watching you—fast asleep, prone under warm blankets, your head turned sideways, your fringed eyes shuttered; or feeding lustily at your mother's full round breasts; or lying on your back waving your bent froglike arms and legs, grasping with your dimpled hands and prehensile feet at the sunlit air. I discovered then the singular joy of addressing talk to an uncomprehending infant, of seeing the candid inquiry, the staring wonder in your eyes under their incredibly long curling lashes, of watching the dimples come and go with your fleeting smiles, the questioning quirk of the eyebrows, the tongue-chewing effort to answer your father's talk, the mouth breaking into an answering crow. For at six weeks you were trying with all your might to discover how it was we made those sounds at you—my foolish fond talk, and your mother's songs which held you spellbound. Your eyes, deep blue and shining, were fixed on her mouth as your small mouth worked, your lips twisting, your tiny red tongue going in and out, your whole body asquirm—until suddenly those small sounds, first a sigh, then a burble, and finally a little shout, came out, astounding you as much as it did us. Though you could cry and crow, coo, chuckle and yell so lustily—opening your toothless jaws in a dimpled grin or a beet-red howl—this delicate thing, this talk, was something else, an art to be mastered, something you needed badly and must get.

And how does he know he wants this? I would wonder, staring into your eager eyes as you tried again and again to imitate my speech. Then I would touch your face, the silken smoothness of your skin, and when your mouth widened in a smile it was an unspeakable delight to me that I had pleased you. And how surprising to get the first sign of your sensitivity when you broke into lamentable

crying because your mother impatiently said something cross to you; and later when Rachel told me of it, mimicking the mournful face you had made, at sight of it you burst again into tearful wailing!

Soon, lying on your belly, you were raising yourself on your arms, turning your head from side to side, your eyes caught by color. Then you managed to roll over from your back to your belly after some difficulty with a troublesome arm in the way. And then one momentous day after trying vainly to move forward by squirming like a snake or by swimming like a fish, or by pivoting on your belly with flailing arms, you discovered that you could double your legs under you. Thus for a while you lay with your round backside raised, your face fallen into the pillow, struggling to hoist your body. And when with one knee advanced you did lift your trunk and looked around with surprise, how pleased and triumphant you were! And when you collapsed, fell over on your face or rolled over and bumped your head, how loudly you wept! But intent on getting to the gaily colored basket in the corner you tried again, and finally by pushing with one fat leg at a time you crawled!

Then as you scuffled about, your delightful discoveries and accomplishments followed fast on each other. You learned that it was easier to crawl backwards than forwards, something all mankind, alas, appears to discover from time to time. And you wanted to climb long before you could walk, just as I dreamed of a ladder to heaven before I had made my way across the earth. Fearlessly you crawled to the edge of an abyss, or clambered up and let go your hold, falling or sitting down without seeing where you would land. You found the fascination of fire, and loved to lie beating your feet on the floor and watching

the flickering flames on the hearth. Then came an interest in the patterns made by light and color, when nothing held your gaze so fixedly, with such round-eyed excitement, as the bright figures in the tablecloth, a fluttering curtain, the carpet on which you crawled, or your mother's dress; and it appeared then that you had found in yourself man's passion for design, for the creation of a pleasing order in the apparently chaotic variety of nature.

Only later came the discovery and recognition of your devoted father, whose proud attention to your progress—your growth in weight and height, the strengthening of your shapely legs and your flailing arms still too short to reach to the top of your curly head, the thickening of your calves and buttocks, chest and shoulders—you noticed, if at all, with a curious stare, intent and sober, from under knitted brows, each time as if you had never seen him before. What delight you gave him when you first reached for his face, scratching its roughness with your tiny and eager warm fingers, surprisingly traplike in the tenacious hold they took. What exciting contentment when he saw your first ungainly gulping of milk from a cup instead of from your mother's breast—and then your open-mouthed reaching for the first feeding from a spoon, your learning to swallow solid food, acquiring a variety of tastes—wanting everything in your moist warm mouth from your toys to your father's finger. What peaceful contentment to put you to bed, reluctant to stop your riotous romping and laughter, crying your drowsy complaint, yet whimpering off to sleep like a breathless image, reverting to that indrawn lifeless look of aloneness of the newly born. And what happy contentment when he heard again your burbling wordless talk and shouting when you woke in the early morning, filling the air with your word-



less calls and exclamations, your almost meaningful phrases of sound.

And often it was so early I would have given anything for another bit of sleep. Yet when Rachel had brought you into our warm bed there was no resisting your restless playfulness, your gleeful scrambling, your reaching for ears and eyes and mouth, your playing hide and seek in a tent in the bedclothes. It made my flesh proud and happy, lying there with wife and child, her silken head against my shoulder, your small strong body arching against mine, her soft arms about me while your sweet small hands were clawing my face and your firm legs beat upon the loins whence you had come.

Then I knew contentment in all its aspects—God in his infinite goodness had given me something far beyond my dreams and my asking, something from which even he could take no tithe. I was certain then that I was settled for life; that I should never want to wander again; that I would never leave Haran where I had found this perfect contentment.

No, not perfect—not all the hours of every day and night; for it was not long after my first sight of you and the remarkable flatness of Rachel's belly that I perceived how truly disrupting had been the effect of your advent—of this fruit of love in our Eden. The effect on my Eve was phenomenal. Not that she was any the less lovely. On the contrary. I shall never forget how she appeared for the first time after she was fully recovered. She had just bathed you, and when she came out with you in her arms, her blue eyes sparkling, her cheeks flushed, her golden hair flying in disorder round her face as she held you up to the sunshine, her beauty was breathtaking, startling, incredible, miraculous, more wonderful indeed than the

beauty of that Rachel I had married and loved so perfectly after seven years of devoted labor.

But this Rachel was no longer devoted to the love, however perfect, of a husband alone. No longer would he wake in the night to find her eager for his desire. She would be sitting up engaged in feeding the infant, singing softly to him as he sucked the sweet breast. Then she must wait upon his bowels; then make him clean and get him back to sleep.

It appeared indeed that Rachel was passionately devoted now, not to the needs and desires of her husband, Jacob, but to the bowels of her son, Joseph. In the early morning, before day, before cock-crow she, who was wont to lie with me, as if drowned, in the deep sleep of lovers, wakened now willingly to rise at your first cry, and I would pry open my eyes to see her naked loveliness in the chill dawn, bent over you, murmuring steadily to your cooing as she tended your incessant needs.

Only after you were content and cleansed would she come to me; and then, because you would not sleep after dawn, I too must wake and play with you. But then between your sweet, warm fragrant softness and hers I was proud and happy as can be only the creator who sees what he has made, and knows that it is good. That satisfaction God too has known. But that other ecstasy we had had, that inspired passion which it had seemed to me God might have envied, that became rare with your advent; that escaped us in your demanding and undeniable presence, never, alas, to be quite recaptured.

Us, I say, although I was certain for my part that your coming had made no remarkable change in me. No matter how much a man may be interested in his offspring, that need does not become his primary interest; the pattern of

his preoccupations is not noticeably altered, except for its enrichment by the addition of that interest to all his others. He does not reorient the days of his life as the mother does. For Rachel, everything, the whole program and purpose of her existence, was readjusted to your wants. It did not matter that I longed for and tried to regain with her those moments of unutterable ecstasy. Her body and spirit were now dedicated to another service in which I had no longer a part; where, having served my male function as a means to her end—her womanly passion for child-bearing—I was now a troublesome intruder with my expectation of something more than mere love.

Rachel, my fair tender bride, now seemed to find a sort of ecstasy in serving even the most repulsive needs of your well-being. The beautiful and pampered daughter of wealthy Laban would examine carefully and without repugnance your stinking stools, observing the effect of your feeding on their color and texture; she would rise up in the night to see to your timely elimination. She was unwearied by your frequent soiling and wetting; the business of keeping you clean and sweet was her unfailing pleasure, especially in bathing you carefully, in washing and drying all the crevices of your plump little body, and rubbing you with oil in the sun. And because you knew surely that in her sight everything about you was lovable you greeted your mother with ready laughter, with cooing and babbling, reaching for her hair and eyes; but that father, whom at first you hardly noticed, you eyed with calm, wide-eyed interest, waiting for him to entertain you, to toss you, to make faces and noises which might as frequently frighten as please you.

It seems now that I must from the first have been a bit jealous of you, although then I should have hotly denied

the suggestion. For all the passion of humanity to perpetuate itself, we dislike the evidence that we are forever being supplanted by those who, after our last planting in darkness underground, will flourish in the sun and air above us. And there is, besides, cause for more immediate jealousy. Consider how you had come between me and your mother; usurping and deforming her beloved body so that it was months before she regained her beauty and then not without blemish; clutching and feeding upon her lovely breasts, which, when you had finished with them, had to be bound up for drying and were never again to be exquisite as they once were; consider how you distracted her from my desires with your needs, so that she left my arms at your slightest bidding. She wearied herself so in your day-long service that she slept like a stone, deaf to any sound I might make, even were I to groan in agony; but one faint wail from you in the anguish of those teeth which took shape under your inflamed gums, and she would rise like a sleep-walker and be gone to you. I might well have been jealous of one who had robbed us both of that wonderful and wildly passionate communion which I knew we would never again find. I might well have been jealous of one who had within a few months changed my heart's desire, for whom I had willingly given the labors of fourteen years of my life, into a woman who could be indifferent and even at times inimical to me. For no longer was she so concerned about the food which would please me as about the food which would nourish you. No longer was she intent on making in my house the order I thought seemly; much more was she intent on the knitting, the sewing, the bathing, the routine of countless activities revolving about you and your needs, with which she littered every room. And no longer was she anxious to have my

opinion and to follow my advice; for the growing independence I had observed during her pregnancy had flowered into a wilfulness, a stubborn resistance to further guidance, and an assumption of complete competence to take her own way—particularly in matters concerning your welfare—even when it proved fumbling and foolish. Then she was especially ready to argue the justice of her judgment, no matter how irrationally. Of course we quarreled; and sometimes she took flight from our difficulties in strange and frightening hysterics; and though I loved peace and graciousness and hated anger as I hated disorder—though I saw the wisdom of my father's favorite saying:

*Be swift to hear;  
And with patience make thine answer*

yet one day I was horrified to catch myself quoting bitterly—as I had once heard him quoting it to my mother—that proverb:

*It is better to dwell in the corner of a housetop  
Than with a contentious woman in a wide house.*

When my father said it I had been shocked to see that tears stood suddenly trembling and twinkling in my mother's eyes. But it did not help matters for me. Rachel remained dry-eyed; and, with unspeakable exasperation, said nothing. And with deeply hurt pride I saw that I had somehow lost all influence over her.

My father-in-law, overhearing one of our differences and seeing me moody thereafter, tried to cheer me by inviting my confidence while we were at work together. I complained to him of what had happened to Rachel.

His chuckle was not exactly comforting. "I don't like to remind you, Jacob, that when you were so set on get-

ting your 'heart's desire' I told you that even when a man marries just once he is really getting at least two women; and by the time she has had a couple of kids . . ."

"I know. I know what you said," I said, impatient with his smug reminder. "What I want to know is what ails Rachel—why does she have to be so—so . . ."

"So wilful, so arrogant, eh?" He shrugged his heavy shoulders. "Why? Why do you have to know why? Who knows why anything is as it is? And if you know why a woman is what she is, will it help you with her? Maybe unwittingly they hate us for what childbearing does to their beauty—to their haunches grown heavy from carrying the burden, to their bellies flabby from distension, and their breasts grown big for feeding. Maybe deep down in them they resent the terrible childbirth pangs they have had to bear because of us, although you would hardly think so from the way they generally want more children. Maybe it is that surviving that ordeal and producing a child gives them a sense of superiority over us, who cannot possibly do the same. And sometimes I think the strain is really a bit too much for them," he tapped his forehead, "and I'm sure most of us men would come out of it not only shrewish but madly vengeful against those who had got us into it. Or maybe it is only that serving a helpless child gives a woman such a feeling of authority and power that she cannot go back again to being submissive to a man, even if she does still love him. But what does it matter why they change? The important thing for a man to know is that he will always be deceived in marriage, not because of another man, but because he finds another woman in his wife." He laughed. "But can you tell him that in advance? No!"

A light burned in my memory. "My father once said

that a man doesn't really live with the woman he marries, even if he picks her himself. He also said something about women being resentful of having to love those who rule them. I didn't know then what he meant."

"But you know now," said Laban. "Don't you?"

"I think so," I said.

"And your father was right?"

"Well, yes and no. I still love Rachel above all other women."

Laban shook his stout head. "You are unteachable—like the rest of us," he muttered, and went on with his work.

*...and Jacob served ...*

L<sub>ABAN</sub> was a breeder of cattle not because of any special interest in that particular pursuit but for the profit in it. And I went to work for Laban and became a breeder of cattle because I wanted to marry Laban's daughter, Rachel. Such are the common motives of men for the business which consumes their days. Yet, though their motives be selfish and their objectives—say, the breeding of sheep—be the same, yet may the nature of their occupations be quite different. For sheep-breeding to Laban was one thing and to me quite another.

Laban had got from his father some of the folklore of cattle-breeding and these, together with such valuable tricks, rules-of-thumb and bits of information as he had been able to get from others who had inherited or stumbled upon them, were the basis of his success. I do not wish to belittle the value of such information. It is upon the store of such knowledge accidentally discovered or patiently observed and accumulated for generations by unnumbered men and for commonplace reasons that we



depend for the bread and meat we eat, the clothes we wear, the houses we live in, and countless other things which raise man's life above the beast's. And that Laban, who was no lover of learning, was much less interested in sheep than in the wealth they brought him does not alter the fact that because of him sheep were plentiful in Haran—though not as plentiful nor as cheap as they might have been. For a good deal of Laban's profit came from supplying with meat the armies of his warlike brothers and neighbors, whose frequent conflicts, resulting in the destruction of a good deal of cattle, also increased his business.

To a lover of knowledge like myself, the pursuit of it is quite another business—neither so accidental nor so mercenary—than it is for a man like Laban. And though, as I have said, my reason for breeding cattle was no less selfish than his, yet my love of knowledge made it another occupation than his. For my curiosity was not satisfied in merely learning the ordinary business of breeding sheep; my curiosity was merely aroused by it. I must know why this or that was done in that or this way, and why not otherwise; and was it not possible there were other and better ways of doing this and that; and above all, what were the immutable laws of nature which underlay all this? So that in the end it would be as difficult for me to prove that my curiosity was aroused because I wanted to breed more sheep rather than for its own satisfaction, as it would be for a man to deny that his desire for a woman rose from his profound wish to propagate his kind rather than for his own gratification.

I remember watching your infant struggles to crawl and learn to walk; and I would wonder is it really the wish to walk which impels the child to that effort, or is it just his curiosity about the bright-colored basket or

the toy he sees across the pen there beyond his reach? It seemed to me then that it was curiosity which taught you to walk; and it seems to me now that, whereas in most men like Laban and my brother Esau that childlike curiosity dies so that they seek knowledge only when it serves their need, there are those of us in whom that curiosity persists insatiably, and for these the painstaking pursuit of knowledge is itself a satisfaction—the satisfaction of a profound need and hunger. For me the pursuit of knowledge, the discovery possible in breeding Laban's cattle was like an extension of that curious delving and wandering to which I was moved in my boyhood and which still obsessed me when Esau's anger drove me away from home on the road to Haran.

So it was not enough for me to learn from Laban and his herdsmen their practical rules of breeding, of mating for pure strains and cross-breeding for improvement, of feeding and care, rules which were followed because they were traditional or because someone had happened upon and apparently succeeded with them. Neither hearsay nor tradition were final authority for me. I must test all the rules myself; and some indeed, under trial, proved not in the least effective, and were discarded to the dismay of the conservative old hands and the impatience of Laban, who thought I was wasting time with my "childish" experiments.

"Suppose you do find out that some of the old things we do are useless. Old timers like me feel more comfortable doing them, and that's worth something." But he sang a different tune when my experiments turned up something directly profitable to the cattle.

It had been observed that cows had a habit of consuming the placenta after dropping a calf, and this was con-

sidered just a beastly habit to be discouraged. But when I proved that eating the placenta was good for the cow, which healed faster and was less apt to develop fever and gave more milk than one which had been deprived of it, then Laban heartily approved of my studies, and urged me to go on with them. When he saw that my "childish" curiosity might be profitable he was willing to support and exploit it; although he was inclined to minimize the value of what I did, saying that only a very small part of my results were of practical value, which was true, but that did not matter to me.

For then I was a truly contented man. What Laban made out of the results of my labors did not concern me. He had given me my heart's desire. In his prosperous household all the needs of my body were provided for, and in his service my restless mind was free to delve into the mysteries of creation. In body I was appeased, in heart I was happy, and in mind—but it is difficult to express the nature of the satisfaction of the mind whose hunger is as keen as the body's but is not for nourishment, whose desire is as great as the heart's but not for self-love. For the contentment of the seeking mind comes in limitless revelation; the satisfaction of that mind is in its unconfined seeking. So who can say what is the happiness of the restless mind? Though in its pursuits it is in one way not unlike the hunting of Esau, and in another like Laban's accumulation of wealth, yet its happiness is incomprehensible to the Esaus and the Labans; what they cannot comprehend is its selflessness.

For what is it that the man of mind wants for himself? they wonder—the Esaus thinking of the venison they take in the hunt or the loot they win in battle, and the Labans thinking of the money they get in shrewd trading. Once

my father-in-law found me at work on something which he thought could not possibly be of value in connection with his cattle. It was just after you, my son, were born, and I was considering the well-known injunction that circumcision be performed on the eighth day. Some of my best findings have come from the investigation of such unexplained folk practices. In this case I was curious to know why the eighth day had been set as the proper time; and by experiment with young animals I learned why: In the first week of its life the blood of the young creature does not yet have the property of rapid coagulation. It is only by the seventh day that the thickening element appears, hence it is not until the eighth day that it becomes safe to wound the infant.

"That's interesting, to be sure," said my father-in-law, unimpressed. "But since we have long had the rule about circumcision on the eighth day, I don't see what value your discovery has."

"Well," said I, not particularly interested in proving the "value" of my finding, but feeling obliged to by his attitude, "it tells us why a wound is especially dangerous for very young creatures."

"But no one with any sense, Jacob, is going to wound a new-born babe, or even a lamb; and if it is wounded what can you do about it with all your discovery? Nothing."

"But that wasn't the object of my experiment," I said in exasperation.

"Then what was the object, may I ask?"

"Knowledge," I said.

"Knowledge? For what purpose?" said he, his small eyes peering at me with plain puzzlement.

"For no purpose," said I. "Just for knowledge."

Whereupon he looked at me as one looks at some strange incredible creature; then he threw up his hands and left me.

Nor was I being stubborn or proud with him. It was a simple truth I had spoken, which no amount of explaining might make clear to a Laban.

But you, my son, will, I think, understand what I said to my father-in-law; that is, if you are the kind of man I expect you to be—a man of mind and sensibility. Then you will see how men differ in their attitudes toward the forces of nature—the Esaus fighting them for power, the Labans manipulating and exploiting them for profit, and the Jacobs, like lovers, wanting only to know, to possess and to live happily with them.

Then you will easily understand how in studying Laban's cattle, their life, death and propagation, in achieving a knowledge of the intricate living processes of nature which is available to few men, I got the sense of approaching divinity, and as I went on accumulating and fitting together the infinitely various information I ferreted out into a coherent structure of knowledge, it was as if I were building a tower toward divine omniscience, a soaring structure which gave me a great vision of life; a vision which was indescribably exhilarating, but which, like visions from high places, was also alarming. For the higher it got the more I could see of the vast ignorance of humanity, of the infinitude of yet unpenetrated darkness which surrounds us; and there were times of discouragement when I thought: this building of mine will never be finished; though my son and his son's sons for generations continue to work on it, it can end only in confusion—like the Tower of Babel. Man is no match for creation. And how absurd for the tellers of that old tale to make

God fearful and jealous of the aspiration of his own creatures. Man may in his pursuit of knowledge feel himself at times approaching the omniscience of divinity, but at what an infinitesimal snail's pace he moves toward that infinite goal!

So I must warn you, my son, that the same intelligence which gives the mind of one man such divine insights and moments of elated vision vouchsafed to few others also bring him painful dissatisfaction and bafflement when he sees clearly his own limitations.

I remember how happily you used to play with some wooden pieces, balls and blocks with holes in them, into which connecting rods could be fitted. "I put the green one here," you would say as you fitted the green block into place, "and I put the red one here," building a curious conglomeration which suited your fancy. But should the pieces not fit, as you wished, or should your elaborate structure collapse, what a cry of outrage would rise up as you struggled with the toys and finally flung them away in tears, as if they were possessed of some spirit refractory to your will. So too there were times when it seemed in my bafflement that the creator of the universe had deliberately devised our world so complexly, so secretly, merely to mystify us; it seemed as if it were all part of a game he was playing with us, a malicious game of conundrums which often becomes a desperate game for us. For if this world was intended for the sustenance of man, why was even that knowledge of it which is necessary for his survival hidden from him—made so difficult for man to obtain? Why had he first to learn the growing and grinding of wheat to make flour, to be baked into bread? Why must he search patiently, as I did, among the herbs and barks for those essences which allay the

fatal fevers of his cattle and his own kind? And there were times in my exasperation when I, too, could have flung away what I was trying to put together and cried that there is a spirit in nature bent on our bafflement, our confusion, and even on our destruction. Thus it is that the man of mind gets not only satisfaction but suffering from his vision.

And for all that I perceived this, was I deterred from study—from research and experiment? No more than a man is deterred from life itself though he must know death awaits him in the end. For as every man's eagerness is for life, in the midst of which he feels himself immortal, so it is with those of us who pursue knowledge. Engrossed in that pursuit we feel there is no limit to our powers of learning. Our moments of doubt and fear are like the times of illness or injury which even the strongest may suffer, when death comes close and cannot be ignored; they pass and are soon forgotten.

So I went on zealously and happily studying Laban's creatures, learning many of the secrets of their being—from the live foetus in the womb to the cold stiff carcass—their growth and decay, in health and in disease; and from these findings I determined by deduction and experiment how best to maintain them and increase their fruitfulness. It was this last which gratified Laban and made him willing to support me in the rest, in what he considered my "useless" delving for pure knowledge. Though he had no respect for the spirit of inquiry which sought such knowledge, he did develop a high regard for my ability to discover things of value to him. For as a result of my discoveries his flocks were greatly increased and improved; he was profiting enormously from my efforts, and from being moderately well-to-do he became by far

the most prosperous, the richest of all the herders in Haran.

And it seemed to me a pity that my discoveries should not also be known to others who might likewise profit from them; but Laban, when I suggested to him my making them public, snorted and said vehemently, "Nonsense! It is easy to see you're no business man. It is in my employ that you have found them, isn't it?"

I am not able to deny that my impulse was entirely unselfish either; I did indeed have in mind the fame which my discoveries would bring me when broadcast, but I can say truthfully that stronger than that was my feeling that knowledge should not be hidden for the exploitation of a fortunate few but should be given out for the benefit of all. That there should be no private ownership of knowledge I decided when I heard that Laban was hiding from other herdsmen information which I had unearthed and which was of no use in connection with his cattle but might be of value to other breeds. And this I said to my father-in-law.

"But then," said he, "I would have no advantage over my competitors in Haran." Laban lived in constant dread of his competitors in the business of cattle-raising.

"But why need you be competitors?" said I. "Since you are all interested in raising cattle, why not get together and pool your resources? Then you need not worry about each other and there would be more cattle for everyone."

"You mean," said Laban, "that you think you can make partners out of competitors? Then you don't know human nature. Of course if they are relatives, brothers, maybe you can trust them. And even then you are taking a chance. Of course if you can get all the dealers to combine to keep the price up that's fine, but someone always



starts cutting; or a new crowd of independents comes into the field. In this world it is every man for himself, and don't you forget it, my lad. Most men want to fight. And men who have any sense and don't enjoy getting their necks broken stay home and make a profit out of the conflicts of other men. You are an idealist, Jacob." He said it sadly, as if that damned me. "And if it weren't for me you would probably be starving in this hard and practical world. Give those discoveries away? I should say not! I made it possible for you to find them. I've paid for them. They belong to me!" That settled that, of course; but it set me thinking about the terrible fierceness of Laban's sense of property.

I don't mean to imply that I hadn't myself a sense of property. I had. There were a number of things of mine I would undoubtedly have fought for, but possessiveness was far from being the strongest motive in my life. All of us, however, have it to some degree, and that it serves a natural purpose is indicated by the fact that it makes its appearance so early in life that it can hardly be something merely acquired by learning. You, my child, were not yet a year and a half old when I saw you industriously toddling about and gathering the stones you wanted to "'plash" in the small pool I had made you, and then fiercely defending your stones from another child who wanted them. And "no, no, no!" you would shout, launching yourself on the little visitor who reached for one of your toys, though a moment before you had welcomed him with coos and embraces. I suppose nature implants some possessiveness in all creatures so that they may know enough to provide themselves with what life requires. But the extent to which men like Laban have developed this characteristic is out of all proportion to any possible needs

of their lives. For Laban, who had plenty when I came, got, with my help, great wealth—lands, houses, innumerable cattle and the work of many laborers whom he ground very hard, whose wages he set as he saw fit for the most profit to himself. Yet if some of his workers dared come to him and say that they were underpaid, that a bit more pay was needed to make more tolerable their oppressive lives and the niggardly lives of their children, Laban would get furious to the point of violence.

It was a kind of hysteria not unrelated, I think, now, to the frightened howl you, my child, used to set up in those first few months when, with lolling head, you were not being well supported and some threatening sound or motion made you feel your insecurity.

Laban himself was not a powerful man like my brother, Esau. He was stour but fat, and when he got angry he did not get red like my brother but turned pale and perspired. But since he had arms and men at his command it was possible for him to suppress any threat to his property. Yet from the way he behaved you would think his life was always at stake; and it was plain that with all the wealth he had gathered for his security he was still insecure in a world in which he felt every man's hand was against him. In his distrust of other men he differed from Esau in that instead of wanting to destroy or conquer them Laban, being more civilized, wished only to take advantage of them to his own profit. For when I tried to point out that he really owed most of his wealth to his workers and that they would work all the better for him if he gave them a more generous wage he said, "You are so impractical, Jacob; you are a dreamer, a student, and you really don't know people. It is every man for himself in this world." That was his invariable argument—

regardless of the point. "And if you give a man a finger he will be wanting a whole hand. If they don't like to go on working for me they are free to try to do what I've done. Let them thank their gods that I make work for them, or they would have nothing. . . ."

Laban's reference to their gods (he made very generous sacrifices to his own) reminded me then of some lines from one of those unpleasant poems of my father's, which I had not theretofore understood:

*As one that killeth the son  
Before his father's eye  
Is he that bringeth a sacrifice from the goods of the poor.  
And as a shedder of blood  
Is he that depriveth a hireling of his hire.*

With Laban's attitude toward his men I found it no less difficult to sympathize than with his attitude toward his gods; and it appeared that my coming had disturbed what had been for him a comparatively simple relationship. Having set up in his home and worshipped his own images of his gods, under the conviction that man had better pay some respect to those mysterious powers of creation, he felt satisfied that he could go his own way while they went theirs. Sometimes, in a pinch, he did pray for their help but generally he confined his communications to complimentary songs of praise. As for having any qualms or dreams about them, that never entered his head. He laughed when I told him my dream of the ladder on the way to Haran. He laughed and said he never dreamed about things that did not exist; he meant materially.

And it was not long before I myself began to see that wayside dream as a rather youthful vision. For as I advanced in my work, in my delving into the secrets of

nature, there came that feeling, as I have said, of an approach to divinity; and then I began to think of the creator of the universe not as standing on top of a ladder but as being omnipresent in all his works—that the creator is always in all his creation—and that in my work, in my delving, I was indeed approaching and communicating with him in a reality for which my dream of the ladder was merely a wishful symbol.

When I said that to Laban he smiled at first, and then said uneasily that I was being sacrilegious. But when he saw some of the results of my studies and experiments with his cattle he admitted that I seemed to have a pretty powerful if unscrutable god with me. He didn't mind that, of course, since we were both working for his profit, but it did undermine somewhat the simple set picture he had had of the relation of man and his gods, and it disturbed him to have my notion of it spread around. I tried to make him see that all I was doing was showing that men could better get God's help by study than prayer, but he begged me not to say anything about it to his men. He thought it would make them restless; they were much better off with his kind of god.

My father used to say:

*In the shaking of a sieve the refuse remaineth:  
So does the dross of man in his reasoning.*

*Praise no man before thou hearest him reason;  
For this is the trial of men.*

There came a time when the reasoning of Laban and his kind seemed to me nothing but dross. You couldn't change human nature, they said; men were thus and so and ever would be; yet they feared the effects of new knowledge

and learning upon men. And the truth of the matter came to me: that they saw no hope of change in their world because they wished for no change; they wanted the world to remain as they had ordered it; they had no aspirations other than their own insatiable aggrandizement. Laban was telling the truth when he said he never dreamed about things that did not exist. The Labans, when they dream at all, dream of the things they know and love—of more wealth, of outwitting their competitors, of gaining more power over their less fortunate fellow-men.

But I with my love for the unknown, with my curiosity and imagination, could dream of things that were not yet: of a world in which men would not compete with each other for the wealth which gives them security and power over others, because they would work together for the security of all and none would then need power over others. And man would then find his reassuring need for the sense of power in his discovery and manipulation of the laws of nature, which would bring him closer to his creator and enhance his sense of security in this world. And these discoveries would be made not for selfish exploitation and profit but for the good and security of all; and thus would men no longer be prompted like the builders of the Tower of Babel to build themselves a way to escape from the difficulties of this world and climb up into heaven, because with their divine powers they could make for themselves a heaven on earth. . . .

And as this dream grew in my mind the real world of Haran appeared to me a base one and my service under Laban seemed unworthy of a man of sensibility. I was not unmindful of what I owed to Laban; he had taken me in when I was a wanderer; had given me my heart's desire;

had taught me much and made it possible for me to pursue my own search for knowledge.

But there was another way of looking at it. I had escaped the violence of my simple brother Esau only to fall into the hands of my shrewd uncle Laban, who by offering me what I needed and wanted—food and shelter and my heart's desire—had been able to exploit for his own profit my invaluable spirit which might better be serving all mankind.

And you too, my son, will doubtless in time find yourself faced with the dilemma of choosing to serve your fellow men or having your spirit enslaved in the service of some Laban who will trade on your need for the love of a woman and a livelihood.

And it will not be easy to decide when to work for your own satisfaction and survival and when for the good of mankind. For men of mind and sensibility, since they see clearly and feel keenly, want as much as others the good things of this life for themselves, while seeing and feeling more keenly than others the wants of all mankind.

So, though I had got from Laban my heart's desire and a comfortable living in which I found full satisfaction for body and mind, yet I became dissatisfied because it seemed to me that all my well-being was got unjustly at the expense of my fellow men, and needlessly so, in the light of my dreams of a better community.

But since Laban could not dream of things which did not exist, I saw that it was hopeless to expect to make with him any change in the life of men there in Haran. I would just go on improving and increasing the breed of Laban's cattle to his profit. I could only influence Laban with my vision insofar as it might bring more profit to him, and

Laban could see no profit to himself in any change from the state of things as they were.

So I began to think of leaving Haran, of going back to my father's home, to Canaan, and making there a nation of men living and working together for the good of all; a nation where no man would need and therefore wish to oppress or exploit his fellow men; and where not merely some but all men in their increasing knowledge would approach the divinity of their creator and could make for themselves a heaven on this earth.

*... And it came to pass, when Rachel  
had borne Joseph ...*

YOU WILL discover, my son, that the whole reason for a man's behavior is never as simple as that which he is inclined to give for it. Thus, my growing dissatisfaction with life in Haran cannot, if the whole truth is to be told, be laid entirely to my disapproval of the attitude of men like Laban to their gods and their fellow men. There was also the attitude of Rachel, your mother, to me, which, as I have already indicated, changed so markedly after you were born.

I have told you how from a too-submissive girl she became a wilful and sometimes a stubborn, intractable woman; from having too little initiative she turned headstrong and opinionated. And when I consider now that I had for the most part as little success influencing her whom I loved as I had with Laban, I wonder that I yet had the temerity to think any man could influence any other human being and could dream, as I did, of getting many men to work together for their common good. But the idea that one can teach another is deeply rooted in



some of us, especially in men of sensibility: as witness my telling you this tale, although I know very well that many a man has discovered with bitter regret that he cannot give over, even to those he loves and who love him, to his wife or to his children, the fruits of his experience. In the field of experience, it appears that most people prefer, for some obscure reason, to pick their own fruits. And that, of course, is why mankind makes so little progress.

But, be that as it may, though I discovered after you were born that I could teach Rachel very little, there were times when I was learning a good deal from her; and when I learned with bitterness how estranged a man and woman could be who yet loved each other, I had to study her like a stranger, this new Rachel. It was as if I were exploring new territory. And a trying journey that was sometimes. For except for that experience of bearing a child, which no man, of course, can have, I was in many respects more experienced and better informed than Rachel was, so that her assumption of rightness about something of which she was obviously ignorant was rather difficult to bear. That under such circumstances a man may be tormented beyond his endurance is understandable; it is not easy, however, to admit that he may even reach that point where he will curse the day he ever set eyes on the woman he loves, or may think at moments that he could cheerfully destroy her. For there is no one you can hurt or be hurt by so much as someone you love. I also learned then the patience which I had observed with scornful impatience in my father when my mother tried him, and later in Laban with his silly talkative wife.

And not satisfied with Laban's explanations of the phenomenon of womanly contentiousness I asked myself

if there was not some natural necessity for that change from womanly submissiveness; and it occurred to me then that with the birth of a child the spirit of the woman must be prepared to take over the kind of responsibility for which she had until then looked to the man. For what if the father died? Then she must be ready with her own independence. And with that in mind it was easier to bear with Rachel's not infrequent assumption of rightness even when it seemed to me that she was quite wrong.

I am not talking now about matters of fact. Women are realists and they can be trusted to deal with matters of fact about which they are informed. But when it comes to suggestion for improvement, the imagination of the man of sensibility is certainly superior; nevertheless, though Rachel liked my kind of a mind she did not like it working on what concerned her, because that suggested her own inadequacy. My suggestion then became a personal criticism and was received as such with resentment, or indignation, or grief. And I thought: It is so important to women—to their security—that we think well of them, that they think themselves attractive to us—that any sign of their being faulty in our sight worries and irritates them. I saw that Rachel got none of my satisfaction in pure learning, in a truth for its own sake. On the other hand, neither, like Laban, did she think more of knowledge if it was profitable. She took pride in my learning; but for herself she did not want it so much as the assurance that I thought her adequately informed.

To that end I found it wise not only to refrain from offering her too much advice but to give her praise as often as possible—even at times when, to my mind, it had not been earned. Which of these two is more difficult for a man of sensibility it is difficult to say, since his perceptions

constantly urge him to offer their fruits, and at the same time they make unmerited rewards particularly distasteful to him. Yet I learned to hold my peace when Rachel would interrupt my talk to tell, as if it were her own idea, something she had learned from me. I was learning from Rachel that though women are in general more sensible than men and do indeed for that reason prefer men of sensibility, yet they are nevertheless not entirely like such men in their natures.

I found it disturbing to observe that though Rachel could be quite logical as long as it suited her, yet suddenly she could cast off logic like a weighty and tiresome garment if it brought her to an uncomfortable conclusion. Thus it was, I saw, that women, realists that they are, frequently become devotees of the most wishful faiths; because of a kind of ruthlessness which says, Why let logic stand in your way—between you and what you wish or hope for? Hence I would hardly trust a woman like Rachel to pursue rigorously a search for knowledge for its own sake such as I was engaged in. That kind of pursuit is the invention of men—that kind of devotion to learning.

I have told you how we differed about whether it was wiser to let you learn about fire by getting burnt or by trying to teach you to keep away from it. And there were occasions when she seemed to be using my love for you, my child, as a means of bringing me round to her decision, with a wilful unscrupulousness worthy of her father Laban. When we differed, she would be severe with you. And then when you were unhappy we would compete for your affectionate attention. It hurt me to see that as an infant you recognized her before you did me. But later

when your mother in her irritation with me would bring you to tears and you came to me, your lamentations would be quickly stilled and we were soon at play.

What troubled me most in those altercations was the feeling that Rachel was capable, in her exasperation, of mean reprisal while I never in my greatest anger felt so moved toward her. Yet though she might be meanly angry with me, never would she fail to see that I was well fed. Though she might be so exasperated as to refuse to eat with me she would see to it that as fine food as ever was set before me; much as my mother Rebekah, after she had spanked me for some naughtiness, would see that I got a good meal.

And this too I learned from Rachel: that a woman who loves a man can never understand why a kiss won't settle the difference between them, or why it is he doesn't want her kiss until after the difficulty has been solved. For this I offer no plausible reason. It belongs in the realm of that mystery of what it is like to be a woman of which I have already spoken—and which women may, possibly, some day, but will probably never reveal to men. Rachel I was sure never would, if she could.

And why should they? It is their mystery, in part, which fascinates and draws us to them—not only the curious Jacobs who desire to penetrate all darkness but even the incurious Esaus who do not like strangeness and wish to subdue it. For it is from the dark recess of womanhood that we have all emerged and it is there we all long to re-enter—to return for peace and security. And that darkness, like the darkness in which all knowledge is found, is not easily penetrated.

In my studies of breeding I was led to observe how the process of procreation for men and beasts differed from

that of other creatures. And it struck me then how many different ways, among plants alone, the creator of life had invented to accomplish the invasion by male seed of that fruitful female darkness of the earth. For there are the sly secret seeds of the ferns, those green pellets on the undersides of the fronds dropping silently and unobserved to the soil. And there are the hidden seeds of berry and fruit, encased in the luscious flesh of their containers which tempt birds, beasts and men to pick and carry them off and toss them away in fresh fertile places. And there are the winged seeds of tree and weed which fly themselves through the air to find where they may take root. Yet far more often than not do all of these methods fail.

Nevertheless it was disconcerting for a man who had spent his day successfully delving in nature's dark mysteries to come home and find himself baffled by the inscrutable spirit of his wife. Rachel was on those occasions disconcerting and distracting, as Laban had said she would be when I had got her. There Laban was certainly right. And so had my mother been who said I would forget the peace she had given me in the excitement of other women—the excitement of my lust with Leah, and the excitement of my love for Rachel. But Rachel was now so distracting that sometimes I felt I would only know peace and contentment again if I fled from Haran and left her there with her father. But by that very distraction I was often driven back to my work with determination, to escape the painful realization that the perfection of life I thought I had got with Rachel had somehow escaped me. In my work I had no illusion—I knew that the divine perfection of omniscience could never be achieved. But though nature was sometimes baffling, nature was never inconsistent

and contentious. It was a relief then, when Rachel was in so contentious a mood, to return to the study of nature, where only the mind was involved, and not the heart.

It was then a relief, too, when Rachel's contentiousness was such that I could not approach her with love, to return to Leah, or even to go to one of the handmaidens, where it was a simple physical comfort to expend myself without emotional disturbance. And there again—although I hate to admit it—Laban was right when he denied my smug assurance that I would want only Rachel.

Leah, as I have said, made no demands upon my interest and attention, neither for herself nor for her sons, and was touchingly grateful, unquestioning and happy whenever I came to her. Yet it was when I was with Leah that I knew how much I loved Rachel. Going to Leah only for that relief she afforded me, not having lived with Leah as I had with Rachel, I did not truly know what her nature was. Not that she offered any mystery to me; I thought her lacking in sensibility as well as in beauty. Pretty much unaided, she had developed into an able and competent woman, quietly rearing her uncouth but powerful sons. When I was with Leah, who was considerate and careful, I would be reminded of Rachel's disorder and forgetfulness of my wants; but I would also remember the unexpected and charming if unimportant things Rachel would do, and her beauty which stirred my body and spirit as Leah never could, despite her peaceful virtues.

Yet Rachel's contentiousness became so disturbing that I have no doubt now it contributed largely to my dream of returning to Canaan to make a nation of co-operative men of good will. For I have since observed that men are apt to turn from their insoluble personal problems to the

solution of the problems of humanity—from their troubles at home to what is wrong with the world. But Rachel's beauty was such that I had only to look at her when she was happy, working among the flowers in her garden or sitting there with you, my child, in the sunlight, guarding you as you crawled about fearlessly tasting everything, grass and twigs, or stood holding to her and swaying from side to side keeping time to her singing—and I knew I still loved only Rachel. And though in moments of exasperation I would catch myself muttering from that old song of my father's,

*Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain . . .*

and though I knew well, with my mind, the natural function of her beauty, how it had lured and held me to its own reproduction in you, yet was I moved—passionately moved in heart and body—by that beauty as by nothing else. And though from my work every day with Laban's cattle and in my constant study of their ways I knew well how like we were—man and woman—to the beasts in the modes and processes of our mating and reproduction, yet was the exaltation of my passion for Rachel undiminished. And if it is true, as Laban said, that there are many men who never achieve this exaltation which comes only to those who have found and got their heart's desire, then they are indeed pitiful men; except that since this exaltation is neither imaginable nor describable no man who has not had it can possibly know what he has missed. Which is a mercy.

You would think—would you not?—that women, to whom the admiration of men is profoundly important, would prize their beauty above all things, above even fruitfulness. That would be logical; but it is not so—it is

not womanly. And I have already told you how Rachel, just having given birth to you, my son, in the very act of naming you Joseph expressed the wish to have "added" to her another son. And though bearing and nursing you had left ineradicable marks on her beautiful body nevertheless she persisted in that desire to bear another child.

Now I was not anxious to see Rachel soon pregnant again. I wished first to recapture that ecstasy we had had, which your coming disrupted. With Leah, with Bilhah, with Zilpah, I had had other sons and a daughter, the fruits of my lust; and you, my Joseph, were so right, so lovely, so perfect a fruit of my love that I needed no other. And then too there was my dream of returning to Canaan, now that the time of my contract with Laban was coming to an end; and a pregnancy or a birth, or even a very young child would be a serious hindrance to our going, a danger indeed on so long and hard a journey.

It was this last argument which I advanced to Rachel for my taking certain precautions involving the fruitful and unfruitful periods of mating which I had discovered in my studies of breeding. I insisted then that we put off, if possible, having another child until we got to Canaan. And I urged her to bear it in mind and guard against it if I should forget. Also, I said, this would be an occasion to experiment by applying to ourselves a principle I had got from observing the beasts. And I promised her we would have another child as soon as we got to Canaan.

Rachel listened attentively, but made no comment on my discovery, of which I had said nothing before then, mainly because I was not yet certain enough of my findings. To my surprise she was not disturbed by this revela-



tion; but, putting her hand over mine, she said gently, "You are a restless man, Jacob, and a daring one to be taking such powers into your own hands. But why not stay here in Haran and deal with difficulties with which you are familiar? Must you go where you will find still more and unknown troubles? Remember that if you leave here my father will be displeased, and he may do something violent. You know how he is. If you go you will have behind you his enmity; and have you forgotten your brother Esau? You will have him ahead of you. Better stay here, Jacob. You can get whatever you want if you deal shrewdly with my father. You are really much smarter than he is. Why need you go roaming now? . . ."

And I felt in Rachel, as she talked, the womanly inertia, the womanly resistance to change, to unnecessary motion. She wanted to stay there peacefully and have her children. But I felt too that if I got her to come with me to Canaan and there made the great nation and the good life I had envisioned she would respect me the more. I told her what I had in mind and could see the fine light of her admiration growing in her eyes. "But why not do it here in Haran?" she asked.

"Here the masters of power, the men like your father, will certainly stand in my way; and the masses of men, the workers, knowing that I am related to Laban and that I owe my livelihood to him, will hardly trust me enough to lead them. Here it would be difficult and would only end in violence."

"I'm afraid, Jacob, that it will be so anywhere. Canaan will be no different," said Rachel although she had never set foot out of Haran. "But in any case there is no use your thinking of leaving here until you have got more

wealth of your own. Don't forget you are not alone and footloose as you were when you came to Haran. You can't just pick yourself up and wander off as you did fourteen years ago. You have others to provide for, and it is a long way back to Canaan. . . ."

There was no denying the good sense of her argument.

*... Jacob said unto Laban, Send me away ...*

WOMEN are not altruists. You have to be impersonal and romantic to be an altruist. It is men, not women, who are romantic, especially men of sensibility. And women are rarely impersonal. And when I said it is the men of sensibility and spirit whom women, for the most part, prefer, and will stand behind and support, I did not mean that they do so for any altruistic reason. Your mother Rachel and my mother Rebekah loved me for my spirit, not so much because they hoped I would help others with that spirit but because they saw in it the possibility of a better world for themselves. But it is in supporting, in their quite practical ways, the lives of men of such spirit that women are in effect the mainstays of the progress of all mankind.

Rachel was quite right in saying I was really not in position then to leave Haran and do anything by myself; but I went to Laban and said I wanted to go when my time was up. That had the effect I had hoped for. Laban made no bones then about my value to him. He said, "The Lord

has blessed me for your sake," and he begged me to stay on and breed his cattle.

"Name your own wages," he said.

So I reminded him how well I had served him and increased his cattle to great numbers: "But when shall I provide for my own household?" said I, increasing his anxiety.

"What shall I give you?" said he; and it was as if I were dealing again with my brother Esau when he sold me his birthright for a mess of pottage. But this was another kind of Esau I had to deal with—a far shrewder one. And I had grown shrewder too.

So I made what would seem to him a modest demand, for the less desirable ring-straked and spotted among his goats, and all the black sheep. To which Laban readily assented, not knowing that I had been experimenting with methods for improving those breeds and making them especially prolific.

Now in telling you this, my son, I do not mean to boast of my ability to trick Laban and exploit his ignorance and my knowledge for my own benefit and not for his. Success in such dealings is gratifying only to men like Laban. Nor do I offer that as an excuse for my doing it; I count it in no way a virtuous act. But virtue, you will learn, my son, is not as simple a matter as the psalmists and makers of maxims would have it appear. For in a world where, as Laban said and most men are still in the habit of saying, it is every man for himself—where men are pitted against each other, competing constantly, openly or secretly, for their needs and desires, a pure virtue may easily become suicidal. And since men naturally value their survival and the achievement of their aspirations above all things, in a world where they can insure these only at the expense of other men, virtue is apt to suffer. In such a world decep-

tion is the order of the day and, as my mother, Rebekah, and Laban, my father-in-law, had pointed out, it often comes close to being a virtue—the means to a good end.

So though I dreamed of a world in which deception and exploitation would no longer be necessary, I deceived Laban and exploited my knowledge of breeding at his expense. Beginning with certain bits of fumbling folklore about the possibility of prenatal influence in breeding I had, by careful observation and experiment, learned how to control with a high degree of accuracy certain characteristics of cattle, such as color; and I could produce by cross-breeding practically any desired combination of traits—of color and form, stamina and fertility. It was not long therefore before Laban's herds were yielding me great numbers of ring-straked and spotted goats and black sheep of the finest qualities. And it was not long before I became a man of means in my own right.

But here I must confess that the acquisition of wealth and the comforts and tastes which came with it tended to dull somewhat my zeal for the pursuit of pure knowledge and the urgency of my dream of making a better world in Canaan. I found that I could drive as shrewd and profitable bargains as Laban. And when I saw the pleasure our riches gave Rachel, and when I thought of the inheritance you, my son, might have, I was tempted to give up my dream and stay there in Haran. Besides, it was your birthplace; and it seemed a pity to uproot you from the pleasant home to which you were getting attached, to the house in which you were born, to the garden where you crawled and toddled, to the swing I had hung for you in the great tree through whose fluttering green leaves I first showed you the great blue sky with white clouds sailing and birds flying, and the silver horse turning on top of the barn. . . .

You see here again, my son, how difficult it is to choose between good and evil guidance. My deception of Laban, which I had condoned as a means to the good end of getting enough wealth to take me to Canaan to make a better life, was turning out to be the very thing which would hold me to Haran.

But as I waxed rich Laban got uneasy and suspicious, and his jealous sons, forgetting that I had also enriched their father, grumbled that I was robbing him and them; and I saw that I could stay in Haran only if I undertook independently to maintain my wealth and your inheritance in ruthless competition with them, by fair means or foul, as all men of substance must. And you in turn would have to do the same. The alternative was for me to return to serving Laban for the hire he saw fit to pay me, to let him exploit my powers for whatever would be profitable to him.

Neither prospect pleased me. Neither as master nor as servant, I knew, would the life of Haran suffice for the spirit which had, on the way there, dreamed of a ladder to heaven. And I recalled then why I had set out to gather riches from Laban. I revived my dream of a world in which men would neither have to compete with nor exploit one another, where in working together all men would find ample sustenance for body and spirit. In Haran that dream, I knew, would surely die.

I determined then to leave Laban; but I knew also that, loath as he had been to let me go when I had little more to take with me than my services, he would certainly object to my leaving with the wealth I had got from his wealth. He and his sons could prevent my leaving. But I was determined now not to be despoiled nor driven around by Laban and his sons as my father was by the Philistines. I

would not be like my father who had envied force too much to learn to circumvent it. I had faith in my powers; and I recalled my mother's counsel: "Men like you are not made for fighting." I had learned to get what I needed; I would go my way without strife. It would have to be done very quietly.

I told both Leah and Rachel of my decision. It did not surprise me that Leah said at once that I could count on her fullest assistance in this venture. For the loyalty of a woman who loves a man has nothing to do with his feeling for her. A woman's loyalty, like her love of which it is a part, is not a reasoned or calculated thing; it is not part of a bargain, else Leah would have stood by her father, who had done his best for her, while I had had to be tricked into taking her and keeping her. But Leah loved me for what she saw in me that was good; just as I loved Rachel for her beauty. And though I have said that I cannot tell you, for all my experience of it, what true love is, this much I know: That though true love is loyal it is essentially selfish in that it seeks a satisfaction for the lover. But the love of women seems to be less selfish than the love of men in that while men love what will satisfy and preserve themselves (like Isaac who loved Esau for his venison), women love what they wish to preserve—be it children or men of sensibility. Thus love, which is above all conservative, is not merely our whim, but nature's means among mankind of maintaining the best of her own creation; working much as I did when I chose from my stock for breeding the finer and handsomer creatures and let the rest go to slaughter.

Now, to get back to Leah and Rachel, what really pleased me was Rachel's response to my decision. For all her earlier demurrers, once I had made my determination

clear there was no question of her support of me against her father. "Do whatever God tells you, Jacob," she said; and then to strengthen me in my determination—for, though I was determined, it was not without inward misgiving, I must admit, that I had made such a decision—Rachel did what was characteristic of her: she celebrated this decision by making me a very fine dinner of the dishes she knew I liked best and gave me much wine to cheer me and dispel the qualms and worries which always beset a man of sensibility despite his determination: so much wine in fact that I was cheered and exalted into complete forgetfulness, so that indeed I had no recollection whatever the next morning of how I had spent that night with Rachel. And the next day I was wroth with Rachel for having seduced me into so irresponsible a state in which I might have done something regrettable. But Rachel only laughed and said, "You think and plan too much, Jacob. It is good for a man like you not to know what he is doing, once in a while."

It was more than two months before the suitable occasion for our departure arose, but in the meantime we made all preparations. It was Leah, of course, who did most of the real work of getting the household ready; but Rachel was helpful too in small charming ways; she was cheerful and cheering. Our only difference arose when she insisted on packing all your outworn infant's wear and toys despite our limited luggage. We would need them, she said, for the baby we would have in Canaan.

When Laban was gone to attend to the sheep shearing I quickly gathered my household and my cattle and set out for Canaan; and I had crossed the river and set my face toward the mountain of Gilead, and was three days on the way before Laban got wind of my having left Haran.



...*What hast thou done?*...

IT WAS a relief to be free, to be moving proudly across the earth with the fruit of my loins and all the wealth I had gathered with my wits, a man of means and power among men. And when I recalled how, on my way to Haran, I had also savored my freedom—the release from the limiting ties of home—I saw how a man’s vision of everything changes with time and age. And that youthful vision of freedom—of the individual free to seek unhindered his own unlimited aspiration—looked to me now very immature, childishly selfish, like the attitude of an infant who is concerned for no one’s hunger but his own. For now, though it was with relief I had freed myself from Laban and his way of life, it was another kind of freedom I sought on my way back to Canaan. It was freedom not only for myself but for all my household, and not merely for their well-being but for the betterment of all mankind in the long run. This was no longer the selfish freedom of that irresponsible youth but the responsible freedom of a father and of a brother to all men.

That boy, who had left Canaan to escape his brother's vengeance, had really gone to Haran in search of a destiny of which I had no idea. It was only at Laban's, where my dissatisfaction moved me to a new aspiration, that I became a man and perceived my destiny. Now, like my grandfather Abraham before me, I was going to Canaan to show my people the road to progress. Abraham taught them the unity of the creator of this world. I would teach them to make a creative community of men on this earth. And it was this, as much as the family and wealth I had gathered, that gave me a sense of my maturity.

Of course I worried about what Laban, behind me, would do when he discovered my move; and once in a while I remembered that ahead of me in Canaan there was that strong brother Esau, who had sworn to avenge himself for my deception. Yet it was possible for me to enjoy that free movement between one danger and another, almost with keener enjoyment because of those very dangers. What Rachel had not known when she warned me of them was that men of sensibility, the Jacobs of this earth, not only learn to move precariously among the violent and the powerful, between the Labans and Esaus, but even get to enjoying their dangerous destiny at times. I worried about Laban and about Esau to be sure—yet I felt that, if necessary, when the time came, I would know how to deal with Laban and with Esau too, though just how I was not at all certain.

Rachel, however, displayed no further concern about Laban when the subject came up on the way. "Don't you worry about my father," she said, "even if he does come after us." Why she had suddenly decided that her father was no longer formidable I had then no way of telling, but I was by then quite used to her incalculable inconsistencies,

and I was pleased with this assurance which I took to be a renewed confidence in myself.

Altogether Rachel was delightful in those first ten days which we spent traveling from Haran to the mountain of Gilead. She seemed to be enjoying the trip like a little girl, or rather like a happy queen, with a restful sort of zest; as if the whole journey and all the passing landscape were something which had been undertaken and unrolled especially for her pleasure. She concerned herself about none of the difficulties of travel. She concerned herself only with you, my son.

And you took a good deal of attention in those days. For already, you were a child of marked character—curious and contemplative, intelligent, impatient and gay; a lover of words and of music. Before you could utter a tune you would sway and nod your head as your mother sang or played to you, and now you began to chant and sing to please yourself. Before you could utter a word you would listen intently to her stories with their familiar references to the wind and the tree and the house you knew, and leaning your silky warm cheek against hers your eyes became thoughtful; and now your thoughts were beginning to create something behind those bright eyes, which were no longer merely fixed on the reality before them but were taking that real world inside yourself and recreating it to your own inward vision.

And to this end you had become an instrument for words. You had discovered each day new phrases, repeating them first for the novelty of their sounds and then for the usefulness of their meaning. How amusing it was to hear you repeat what your mother said: "Joey, stand in the corner," again and again, suiting your action to the words, although it was doubtful that you knew what each

word meant. Meaning, indeed, was at first not important to you. For as we traveled and you heard the strange words of the places through which we passed, you picked these up too, repeating them with remarkable precision of accent and inflection, and you even learned from your mother rhymes and songs in those foreign tongues which she knew, although they meant nothing whatever to you. And in a mischievous mood you would play with those strange words, twisting them into other forms and laughing with glee at whatever came to your lips. But how surprising to discover that you had really learned what "ear" is and "shoe," pointing to each in turn with a tiny tapering finger, and the meaning of "pick it up" which you would repeat meticulously a half dozen times in succession, or of "see the light" which you would turn your head to look at, or of "the wind is blowing" which you would indicate by puffing up your fat cheeks and blowing as you looked at the fluttering leaves, or of "smell the flower" which you would hold to your nose and then to mine, or of "bring mother your red coat" which to my astonishment you promptly toddled off and did one day, and then revealed that you had learned the names of a number of colors. And how delightful to see you sitting up at your little table, your curly head perched erect between the small square shoulders on your straight little back as you shouted, "Meat! meat!" and ate with gusto the bits of food your mother laid out for you.

And when I saw how dependent you were on Rachel for the fundamental needs not only of your body but of your mind, I wondered that a child ever gets detached from its mother or ever gets attached to its father. You turned to me then, I thought, only as a novelty, a fresh experience.

For after being rather indifferent to my presence for about a year and a half you began to call "Daddy!" at sight of me, and would grasp my hand, wanting to go with me, to walk, to climb, to be swung, to do things, pick fruit and berries, to see horses and wagons on the road, the birds in the sky, the wind in the tree—all the wide world.

But it was your mother who comforted you when that world seemed ill-made for you, as it had been for a while after you suddenly stood alone and walked a few staggered steps like an unaccustomed small animal upright. Then our world was all out of proportion for you, in size and weight, with its furniture which pinched, or turned and collapsed on you, its tables into which you bumped when you rose up, its chairs which upset when you climbed on them, its stairs too steep and so high that when you lost your balance upon them you fell, twisting your limbs, scraping your chin, bloodying your nose and your teeth. How many of those days which you started with fresh delight turned into a train of painful mishaps! But though your lamentations were loud they were brief. In the arms of your mother you quickly recovered. Your cries were as suddenly stopped as started. With great tears in your eyes you kissed your own small hurt hand just as your mother had.

Nor did you or your mother ask, as I did, why it must be that with pain we learn to adjust ourselves to our world, and that in the course of this learning we must risk our very destruction, for may not those very knocks and bumps, those wounds and scrapings with which we are injured to this life also set up in us the origins of ultimate decay and death?

But a child appears at once to be fragile and indestructible, and it was amazing to see how you took to travel

when we set out for Canaan, sleeping soundly in your swaying bed, or waking to smile and to stretch and look out upon the strange sunlit day from under that funny conical hat your mother had fashioned for your protection. In your mother's care you thrived in the sun and air. You cried, "See! See!" with delight as the world unrolled before your bright eyes. It is a pity you have no recollection of those fleeting days: of your first sight of the salt sea when we stopped on the shore in just such a place as the one where you were so passionately conceived, and you spent happy hours absorbed, earnestly busy with seashells and sticks in the sand, while the warm salt wind stirred your soft curls, and the waves came furling in with a gentle roaring; of how you chased the gulls gathered on the beach, stumbling after them on your chubby legs, as they rose screaming, on wide flapping wings, and you ran printing your tiny tracks in the wet sand.

Best of all at that time you liked to play with things you could manipulate. Strange men and women did not interest you, they could perturb or even frighten you with their harsh voices and hard staring faces. But a child or an animal, a puppy, a kitten, a lamb, or a bird were hailed with cooing confidence. How you arrived at this discrimination there is no telling, any more than how you knew that you could trust in the love of your mother and father to take you safely wherever it was that they, in their mysterious wilfulness, were determined to be going. And I can think of nothing in the world so trustful as your going to sleep on that journey, tucked into your bed by your mother, lifting your curly head to peer out at the firelight or the stars, smiling contentedly as she kissed you

good night and left you there alone in the rocking darkness. . . .

We were at Mount Gilead—stopping for a few days because Rachel said she was indisposed—when Laban and his men caught up with us. He had been riding hard for a week to overtake us; and he was dusty and sweaty, and livid. He was furious. But it was plain from his very first words that beneath his fury was some anxiety which prevented him from the violence to which his anger urged him. He and his sons were well armed and he could have destroyed me—easily, but there was this something restraining him. I saw it in his eyes; I felt it in the tone of his voice:

“What have you done? Why did you have to steal away from me, after all I did for you? You had only to tell me, and while I should have been grieved to see you go away with my children and grandchildren, you need not have run off with them as if they were captives of war. You could have gone with my blessing, after a fine party, and given me a chance to kiss my children good-bye. Why did you do this, Jacob? You know very well I could stop you now if I wished. And as if it weren’t enough for you to behave so ungratefully, as if you hadn’t got enough from me, you had to steal my teraphim, my best household gods. . . .”

At once I knew I was safe. Nothing gives you a feeling of strength in the face of an accusing adversary so much as the knowledge of your innocence. I had not only not stolen his gods—what would I want with his stupid earthen idols!—but, what was even more important, I knew that he had lost them and that without them Laban’s faith in himself was weakened. He was lost. I need not be angry or

deceptive with him. I could speak gently but firmly. I could be honest and open with him. I said:

"I know it was not a gracious departure, Laban, but I was afraid. I heard your sons murmuring against me because of the wealth I was gathering for myself; and I saw your face turning away from me. I knew you were powerful enough to do anything you wished, Laban, to take from me everything I had earned in your service. I knew that since I had grown wealthy I was no longer in your good graces—now that I was no longer your servant but your competitor; and I thought I had better leave you before things got worse between us. I left secretly for fear you might stop me, Laban. But I took nothing that did not belong to me; certainly I did not take your gods. What would I want with your teraphim? You know very well, Laban, that the God of my fathers has served me well, a God whom no one can take from me, who has watched over me and protected me so that I have prospered. What would I want with your gods?"

Laban admitted then that the night before he had dreamed of the God of Abraham and Isaac who had admonished him not to deal harshly with me, and I knew very well he would do me no harm; I had nothing to fear from him.

"Search my goods," I said, "search all my household, and if you find anything belonging to you, if you find that anyone among us has taken your gods, let death be his or her punishment."

I saw that my candor was working on him, as had my reference to the powerful God who was with me. Laban said not a word. Crestfallen, he set about searching all my household—even my things, and Leah's luggage, and the bags and boxes of Rachel, who lay languidly among her



cushions, watching her poor father sweating over his fruitless search. And when Laban came to look under her couch Rachel smiled at him and said, "You must excuse me, father, if I do not get up to help you, but I really cannot in this condition. Anyway you are just wasting your time. Jacob stole nothing from you."

Then Laban gave up; he turned to me and admitted sheepishly that he had been mistaken. Whereupon I thought it expedient to display my anger. I turned upon him. I asked him what he meant by pursuing me like a criminal, by searching my goods and the belongings of my household as if we were ignorant and helpless wanderers. "For twenty years," I reminded him, "I was with you and served you faithfully. I looked after the fertility and multiplication of your ewes and goats; I ate none of your rams. When wild beasts tore your animals I bore the loss as you unjustly required it of me, whether they were taken by night or by day. Day and night I served you, summer and winter—drought consumed me by day and frost by night; sleep fled from my eyes. . . ."

Laban stood there spellbound by the stream of eloquence distilled by the growing warmth of my self-righteous indignation. "Thus I have served in your house; and you have changed my wages ten times to suit yourself. And except for the God of my fathers, the God of Abraham and Isaac, who has been with me, you would by now have sent me away empty-handed. And God, seeing my affliction and the labor of my hands, rebuked you last night. Thank him that you have been restrained from doing me any harm."

"But Jacob," he pleaded, now trying to save his face, "you must admit that these daughters are my daughters, and these children are my grandchildren, and these cattle

were, in a way, my cattle, and that everything you have came from me. Of course you don't think I would harm my daughters or their children, or take what is theirs. All I wanted was to get you to come back. You knew very well how much I valued your ability. I am not like those of whom it is said,

*It is nothing, it is nothing, says the buyer:  
But when he has gone his way, then he boasts.*

And surely you cannot hold it against me that, when I saw how much you wanted my Rachel, I got as much as I could out of you in exchange for what you wanted so badly. Don't forget you yourself offered me seven years of labor for Rachel, though I admit having raised the price to fourteen before you really got her. But you got Leah and the two handmaids; and see now all the sons you have by them. And you who have been so clever about getting the better of your brother about his birthright, and of your father about his blessing, and of me about my cattle, you surely cannot hold it against me for having once got the better of you."

"My deception of you and others," I said, "was not for mere profit. It was necessary."

Laban laughed wryly. "So it seems to every man. Each man thinks his purposes are not merely selfish. Although you, I must admit, do have different notions from most of us. You would rather take advantage of your rich father-in-law than of those poor workers who are strangers to you. But I tell you, you are foolish, Jacob, if you think you can make a peaceful and prosperous nation of such people in Canaan. Don't you know that old saying? *What peace is there between the hyena and the dog? and what peace between the rich man and the poor? Wild asses are*

*the prey of lions in the wilderness; so poor men are pasture for the rich.* Be sensible, Jacob, come back with me and we will share the wealth there is still to be got in Haran. Do you expect that your brother Esau will stand by while you go into Canaan and set up your dream of a nation? Esau has no use for a man like you; especially after what you did to him. He'll just take what you've got. It is said that he is bent on acquiring everything within reach and has talked of despoiling Haran some day."

"I will deal with Esau when I get to him," said I in all innocence, and not without inward qualms.

But Laban understood it otherwise. His greedy little eyes lighted up. "If you're going to supply Esau with cattle you might act as my agent in case he needs more than you can sell him; especially if he is coming this way."

I was astonished at this suggestion. "You don't mean to say, Laban, that you would want to furnish Esau with cattle when he is bent on war with your own country!"

"Why not?" said Laban. "Business is business; and a sale is a sale, no matter who is the buyer. And I'd rather sell Esau my cattle than have them seized or destroyed in the war."

I assured Laban I had no more desire to use my knowledge of breeding for Esau's war than I had for the like purposes of Laban's warlike customers in Haran.

Laban shrugged his heavy shoulders. "I don't understand you, Jacob. For a smart fellow you are pretty dense about some things, and I really think you ought to be grateful to me for the protection I've afforded you. May your fathers' God help you. You really need him. Anyway, if you're not coming back with me, let us make a covenant."

So we gathered some stones and made a boundary fence

right there, which neither of us would pass over. He barbarously named it Jegar-sahadutha, but I called it Gilead. And this, I thought, until men learn to live and work peaceably together, is as good a way as I know of to solve the problem of their differences.

I have since observed that it is not calamity that separates men: indeed, men are brought together by flood, earthquake, plague and sickness, by those catastrophes and afflictions for which man himself is not to blame and which he is not ashamed to reveal to his neighbor. What separates men is greed or envy, their fear of loss, or their desire for more wealth, all of which rise from their insecurity—that common enemy which is not bent, like a flood, on destroying all, but will spare the shrewdest, the most powerful.

But even powerful men are not always content to let each other go their separate ways in peace. Had Laban had his gods with him and not been afraid of the God who was with me, or had he found his gods with me, he would doubtless have despoiled me of everything—the women and children, the stock and the wealth I had accumulated—and driven me off. There would have been no covenant between us then, you may be sure.

Well, as it was, he rose up early the next morning a much chastened and respectful man, and kissed his daughters and grandchildren good-bye before he left. Your mother, Rachel, was still in bed when he came to say farewell, and she smiled indulgently on him, saying, "Father, I told you you were just wasting your time."

But he had no more than departed when Rachel got out of bed, and from behind her pillows she brought out the two teraphim Laban had been looking for.

Aghast I said, "But Rachel, how could you! Why did you take them?"

"You know very well why I took them, Jacob," she said. "Where would you be now, had I not taken them? I knew my father would come after you, and I knew he would be lost without his gods. You are always saying women are impulsive, that we do rash things. Well, we have our own reasons, good practical ones. We don't take chances just for fun, or excitement, or for some high-flown ambition, as most men do. Remember what they say about Eve? *And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise she took the fruit thereof and did eat; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he did eat.* I can't think of a better reason for doing what she did. I should have done it myself. And I should think men would be grateful for the knowledge which Eve fed Adam."

Rachel calmly let down her hair and began combing and brushing it. Sometimes when we got into an argument she would do this deliberately, it seemed to me, as if to retreat behind that screen with her stubborn decision, as if to shroud it in the mystery of that glossy golden tent in which her face was hidden. She sat there calmly brushing her hair then as if there were nothing more to say.

But I would not be put off, although you, my child, came up and, peering in at her, cried, "Mommy make a turtain, Mommy inside," and crawled in under your mother's hair.

"Of course," I said, "I'm grateful to you for what you did, Rachel; but weren't you afraid to tamper with your father's gods; had you no fear of them?"

"Was Eve afraid, although Adam's God had said they would surely die?" And listening to that hidden voice I

thought how amazingly different was this daring Rachel from the gentle girl I had taken for my heart's desire.

She laughed softly; and I thought for a moment she was laughing at you, who, unmindful of our talk, were playing under the silken tent of her hair; but she said, as she went on combing it, "I have often wondered, Jacob, why men expect us to fear the gods they make. We know you make them, so why should we fear them? The funny thing is that you men who are so daring are yet so fearful. You dare to do such wonderful things, yet sometimes you seem to fear so much—your gods, and even your women." Her hidden voice was mocking. "Perhaps it is because we love and trust more that we are less afraid."

I said, "At the end of the song *To a Virtuous Woman* my father used to sing:

*Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain:  
But a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised."*

Rachel shrugged her shoulders as she shook out her hair, letting you run your small hands through its golden lengths. "I'm sorry Isaac thought so. For why should I fear the Lord? Do men like you fear him when you go searching out his secrets, climbing up into his inmost mysteries? No, you don't fear him then, you love him. Yet you expect us to fear the Lord. Was it because your father couldn't get your mother to fear him that he talked that way?"

And I could almost hear my mother talking to my father as Rachel went on: "It may be that beauty is vain and deceitful, but I notice men go on wanting it for some reason or other." I could hardly dispute her, for even as she sat there talking, her beauty moved me more than her words.

And you too, my son, were entranced in her long lovely hair.

"And I'd like to remind your father," she said, "that the Lord made beauty too; and maybe that's why women have been more inclined to love than to fear him—from the very beginning. He didn't scare Eve enough to keep her from eating the forbidden fruit. And then there was your grandmother Sarah, who laughed in his face, practically dared him to make her pregnant. And judging from some things you told me your mother said, I don't think Rebekah was particularly overawed . . ."

"Now, Rachel," I said, "all that has nothing to do with the question of your taking your father's gods."

"Why not? It has everything to do with it. All I'm saying is that when you men can't manage with your gods so that things go right, women have to take a hand and act without fear of your gods. Just imagine, for a minute, where you'd be now if I hadn't taken my father's gods. You probably wouldn't be alive. And come to think of it, the same thing would be true if Eve hadn't eaten the forbidden fruit, if Sarah hadn't laughed, and if your mother hadn't risked the anger of the God of your father for your sake."

I had to admit that she had a most logical argument. "Then you, like my mother, had little faith in the God of my fathers. You would not rely on him to help me," I said.

"Oh, yes," said your mother, "of course women have faith in the gods men give them. We see what they do for you. I knew what my father's gods would have done for him had he had them. That's why I took them. And certainly I have faith in the God of your fathers, Jacob, but even God must appreciate being spared some unnecessary trouble." She chuckled under her lovely veil. "I thought

we might as well be doubly sure; it was better to have all the gods on our side, wasn't it? Anyway, it just seemed the practical—the right thing to do." She parted the curtain of her hair and looked out. Her eyes were bright with victory as she smiled at me, and I saw that it was no use arguing with Rachel about the wrongness of something that had come out right. And one difference, my son, between the minds of men and women is that a woman will know an action is absolutely right without being quite able to tell you why; while a man can prove quite logically why it is wrong, even though deep in his heart he knows very well it is right. But this paradox I cannot explain for you.

"All the same," I said to Rachel, "I don't see how you had the nerve to do it."

"Do what?" said Rachel, as if she had already forgotten.

"Deceive your father."

"You haven't forgotten that you once deceived yours, have you? I don't mean to chide you, Jacob. Children sometimes have to deceive the parents who get in the way they must go. Parents should not stand in the way of their children," she said; and it was, as she spoke, as if the spirit of Rachel, my wife, were becoming one with the spirit of my dead mother. "That's why, though I deceived my father, I will never deceive my child. I'll never deceive Joey. When he asks me a question I shall always tell him the truth as best I can. When I promise him something, a toy, a ride, no matter what, I make it a point to see that he gets it. I'll never deceive him, Jacob, I promise you."

She was sweet. "You don't look a bit sick any more," I said, remarking then how suddenly she had recovered



from her indisposition. "Are you well enough now to go on?"

"Of course, Jacob. I haven't really been sick," she said. "I knew you were expecting me to be sick about this time; I was just a little tired and anyway I thought we had better stop and let my father catch up with us before he got too angry." She parted her hair, pushed it back from her face. "Now listen, Jacob: before we go on I've got something else to tell you." She looked into my eyes. "I am pregnant," she said. "This is the fourth month."

I was speechless. I thought back hastily over the period during which I had been so careful. Was it possible, after all, that my discovery was valueless for men and women?

Rachel, reading my thoughts, said, "It must have been the night we celebrated and you drank so much wine. Remember?"

Of course I remembered that night, of which I had had no memory the next morning. And it occurred to me that this prompt conception in what could only have been blind lust—considering the difficulty we had experienced in conceiving you when we were so much in love—was evidence of the fact that conception was easier where the spirit was less involved. And though I didn't mind having had by Leah and Zilpah and Bilhah ten sons and a daughter who were the careless creatures of a lustful man prodigal of his powers, it bothered me that I should be having by Rachel, whom I loved, a child conceived by blind accident and not by design. But apart from that there was the danger and inconvenience, which I had so carefully made clear to Rachel; and it was provoking to learn that she had nevertheless disregarded my decision that she had best not get pregnant on this journey—let alone having my experiment spoiled. I said as much,

with some exasperation, although your presence—you sat in her lap, humming and plaiting the glossy ends of her hair—restrained us both.

Rachel sent you off to play by yourself. Then she said, "I can see why your experiments might be useful for cattle, but why should we be bothered with such restrictions? . . . You don't think I have deceived you too, Jacob, do you? I didn't really; that is, not deliberately. I suppose I should have told you right away, but I knew you wanted to get away and had enough on your mind, and you would worry and might put off going if I told you sooner. And I did want to have another baby as soon as possible. . . . But you really needn't worry about my traveling."

I reminded her how I had promised we would have the second child as soon as we got to Canaan. I pointed out that it was her safety I had had in mind.

"But, Jacob, I wanted it sooner and—and you have no idea how funny you were that night; like someone else. You were delightful!" She laughed aloud.

But it did not amuse me just then. I said that I found it curious that she could be so foresighted in the matter of taking her father's gods, but that in this matter, which was equally serious, she could be so careless. It was inconsistent.

"This may seem careless to you, Jacob; it wasn't to me. And there is really nothing inconsistent about the two cases. I was doing just what I wanted in both of them."

"That doesn't make it any the less rash. But so was my grandmother rash; and so was my mother. You are all rash. It would seem that women lack the imagination to foresee trouble. But then, you did foresee what your father would do. So I can't understand why—anyway it

is recklessness that brings most of the trouble men have on this earth."

"Now don't talk nonsense, Jacob." It was exasperating to see she was not angry; she was even amused. "We have brought men something besides trouble. Even Eve when she ate the forbidden fruit. Do you really think Adam would have been content in that stupid Eden, knowing nothing of love and procreation, about which you know so much? You wouldn't have been content, would you now? And it's just silly of you to say we haven't enough imagination." Her blue eyes suddenly burned. "What do you think your mother was doing when she sent you away from your brother? Or I when I stole my father's gods? And do you think it doesn't take imagination to prepare for a baby you've never seen? Of course we don't like to worry, though we do worry when it is really important; nor do we go out of our way looking for trouble, as you do with your too restless minds and bodies. It isn't the possible evil which concerns us so much as the possible good. And that's why there's nothing rash in having a baby to a woman whenever she wants one. And who are you to be talking of recklessness? Why couldn't you stay in Haran and make a good living for your family like other men instead of uprooting and dragging us all across the earth because of some dream you have had!"

She stood up then, and came to me and kissed me. "Not that I didn't want to come with you," she said gently and smiled, but she looked a little guilty. "Jacob, I'll be honest. You were displeased with me so often that sometimes I was afraid you didn't love me any more and might decide to go off and leave me in Haran. So I—I thought it would be better if—if I were pregnant."

Then I felt guilty, remembering those desperate moments when I had thought I might leave her. Had she read my thoughts? "But aren't you silly," I said, "to be thinking such things? And yet you went right on doing what would displease me!"

"But, Jacob, it seems to me often that it is you who have precisely those faults which you find in me. It is you who are rash, and inconsistent, and lacking in the imagination needed to understand others. That surprises you, doesn't it?"

I had to admit that it did.

"But about one thing you are right. Men worry more than women do; that's why they don't live as long as women. I think it is having to do with a child that keeps a woman from worrying. A child so insistently lives in the present. It has to be clothed and fed and cleaned and go to sleep, right now."

You, my child, had returned and were sitting nearby absorbed in playing with three stones you had found. How beautiful you were!—the ideal incarnate—with sunshine in your hair and sunlight gleaming in your wide open eyes as you looked up, with a smile of pure delight breaking in your face. You looked at each of us, impishly, as if amused that we too were engaged in an absorbing game.

"And a woman with a child," said Rachel, "gets to feeling that way herself about all life—that it must be lived in the present. You worry too much, Jacob. Just don't worry about me. I feel fine. It won't do me any harm and it needn't make the slightest difference in our speed. Just you go on, Jacob, and forget all about it." She called you to her and I left her lying on the grassy ground laughing face to face with you.

But I couldn't easily forget about it. And when I remembered how my mother had deceived my father to her own devices, all of life seemed a web of deceptions in which I and my ordered plans were helplessly enmeshed. And I saw then how in one respect both Rachel and Rebekah, your mother and mine, were wise, were undeniably right: men and women might deceive each other, and children might deceive their parents, but if there was to be any hope of an ultimate disentanglement from this web of deception parents must not deceive their children. So I am trying not to deceive you, my son, in this account of my life. I am telling you as honestly as I can what may sometimes seem to you far from admirable. And perhaps your children, if you will in turn as honestly enlighten them, will find less need for deception in their lives.

There was, of course, nothing to do but accept the circumstance. And despite Rachel's protestations, it did make a difference. She naturally became the primary consideration of the household, a position she quite naturally accepted in her condition, and my planned itinerary had to be discarded. As this pregnancy advanced she showed a greater tendency to fatigue than she had the first time, and long stops had to be made. I was constantly worried about the strain on her in that prolonged journey over rough country, and was torn between the fear of hurting her by hastening on and the fear of not getting to Canaan in time for the delivery. And beneath all my anxiety was the irksome fact that my careful plans had been completely disrupted by Rachel's thoughtless or wilful behavior; all these extra difficulties, her own as well as mine, would have been avoided had she heeded my reasoned injunction. But Rachel must not have been listen-

ing to me then but to something inside herself, as women do at such times when they appear to men to be completely self-centered. And I knew then that a woman who wants a child is not to be stopped by mere reason. For procreation is woman's passion, not man's. Because a man may want children for very good reasons; but a woman when she wants children wants them for themselves. And the convenience of others or even her own does not matter then.

And I knew it was no good arguing about that either, since if Rachel wanted a thing to be so she could always find an argument in favor of its being so, no matter how unreasonable.

Then why, I wondered again, why do women prefer men of sensibility?—since we, Jacobs, believe in order, in reason and planning, while they, though practical, rely on their impulses, in which respect they are more like the Esaus who are willing to meet the future as it comes. And at that time my thoughtful and deliberate planning all seemed a romantic notion in this complex world—made yet more complex by the unpredictable and unrestrainable behavior of women, and of men for the most part like my brother Esau.

And as we moved on toward Canaan, added to my growing anxiety for Rachel that other anxiety grew: of how my brother Esau was to be met and dealt with.

...for thou hast striven with God and with men...

I HEARD that Esau was at Seir in Edom.

Of my brother's might—of the violent fury of his power—I did not have to be told when we passed through the country he had vanquished. I was reminded how, when he too asked for a blessing, my father had said, *By the sword shalt thou live*; and it seemed that, as it was in the days before the Flood, *the earth was filled with violence*. Once populous cities stood desolate, in smoking ruins, from which the inhabitants had been driven to death or exile. Once fruitful fields lay ravaged, despoiled as by drought and locusts. Once peacefully ordered homes stood empty, broken, looted, befouled. And everywhere lay the dead, the ghastly slain, their flesh torn, their bones broken. Their bloody bodies, rigid, or bloated, dismembered and disemboweled, rotted in the stench of their corruption; once strong quick men, sweet women and playful children were doomed to destruction by fire, by sword, by torture and starvation, only because they had stood in the way of Esau's will. Those who survived lived

in his servitude, fearful and hateful; or homeless like hunted beasts were hidden in caves. The mere thought of you, my son, growing up to wage such warfare, to be maimed or destroyed in it, was unbearable.

And I recalled with amazement that youth, myself on the way to Haran, who, entranced with his own freedom and the wonders of the world, turned aside from such revolting scenes with the thought that the battles of others need not concern him and, in his search for self-satisfaction, went hastening on with the thought that such conflicts were foolish, that when men could not settle their differences each man had only to go his own way, as he did. How self-centered, how short-sighted was the vision of that youth! For I saw now how the selfish aspirations of irresponsible and violent men turned human life into a dog-fight—led directly to this dreadful warfare, in which even I had taken part indirectly in working for Laban. Now, facing this horror as a man, I saw still more clearly why men must learn to work together for peaceful progress; I saw, too, the fallacy of hoping forever to turn aside from the conflicts of other men, or from conflict with them. I, who had left Esau and come to Laban, and left Laban, was returning to Esau.

A child, being helpless, takes greedily what its parents give it, that it may live. Youth, uninformed, goes its self-centered way to learning. But in his maturity a man turns back to others, to his kind; and, whether he does so in violence or in peace, it is because he learns that in one way or another he must deal with his fellows. Now I would have to deal with my brother. And remembering how I had once bested Esau and, knowing that he would remember, I feared dreadfully to meet my brother. I lay



awake in the nights worrying about how best to approach him.

And your mother was no great help or comfort to me then. She complained of my disturbing her sleep with my wakefulness, reminding me how she had advised against leaving Haran. "But what's the good of worrying now? You are always making trouble for yourself, Jacob, and then expecting people to sympathize with you in your distress." Which was, and for that matter still is, fairly true.

But I felt that, as the proverb says, *there is a time for every purpose under heaven*, and there is a time for truth too. So I got more cheer from Leah who said, "Tell us what we must do to help you." Although it would have cheered me more had Rachel said it.

I rashly reminded your mother that though I might have made trouble for myself in the past, I had nevertheless got the support of the God of my fathers.

"That's fine," she answered, "but don't forget that this time you haven't got Esau's god in your pocket; and the chances are he doesn't put much stock in gods anyway."

"Not likely," I admitted. "He never did."

"And you will recall that though Abel was in good favor with God that did not prevent Cain from killing him." It was uncomfortably like my mother talking to my father. All the same Rachel herself was quite unperturbed at the prospect. With that irritating air of complacent and undeniable authority which came from no possible experience but seemed to rise simply from her pregnancy she said, "Send Esau a flattering message. That will bring him round. Those big fellows always need to have their self-esteem bolstered up."

I sent messengers on ahead to Seir to tell Esau I was

returning to Canaan with all my family and wealth and humbly prayed for his favor.

My messengers returned with the news that Esau, accompanied by an armed band, was coming to meet me. Then, desperately worried, I divided my household and my goods into two parties in the hope that if Esau attacked one the other might escape. I also sent on to him by messengers a number of princely gifts of cattle in the hope of appeasing him.

The great assurance one has when spurred by an aspiring ambition is apt to dissolve into as great distress at the imminent approach of a decisive trial. I began babbling prayers to the God of my fathers, reminding him of what he had already done for me as well as of what he had promised me, calling his attention to the fact that if Esau came and destroyed me and my offspring we could never become *as the sands of the sea*, which was what he had said we would be; and suggesting that it would be a pity, after having let me reveal so much of his truth, not to deliver me from the violent hand of my brother, who knew little of God's truths and cared less for them. . . . And in my anxiety for his aid I charged him with having told me to return to Canaan, forgetting that it was my own wish in the first place. It often happens that one has the feeling in a dilemma of having been spurred to the dangerous deed by a power greater than one's self; and there may indeed be good reason for that feeling.

Be that as it may, by the time we arrived at the ford of the Jabbok River I was so unnerved at the prospect of meeting Esau that I sent all my household ahead across the stream while I remained and spent the night alone on the other side. I was ashamed and afraid to let Rachel and

the rest see to what depths of fear and uncertainty I had sunk.

Alone in the darkness on the bank of that stream flowing by me as steadily, as irrevocably as life itself I wrestled with the trouble I had brought upon myself—by deception, because of my ambition and aspiration. And since I could truly blame only myself for it I was determined myself to solve and survive this difficulty; so I strove to find the way I should go to circumvent it, as well as the courage to face it; but failing that, in desperation I turned to the God of my fathers whose support I had once so naively invoked from the foot of that heavenly ladder I saw in my youthful dream on the way to Haran. And though in Haran it had seemed to me that I had, through knowledge, maintained his support for my good fortune, yet now in my great need I did not find it so easy to approach him, to achieve the divinity I needed; all the knowledge I had gathered seemed yet inadequate in this extremity. Nor could I take refuge in sleep or youthful dreaming; no heavenly ladder appeared. So I called upon the creator of the earth to come down to me, and I spent all the night wrestling with him as with a stubborn adversary. This was no aspiring dream of divinity; this was a desperate nightmare struggle upon the dark earth. I needed and wanted now to grasp my creator, to apprehend him not merely as the God of my fathers but, in accordance with the counsel of my mother, as my own God, to seize and take him into myself so that he would indeed be with me. For I saw now how childish had been my vow, my proffered bargain on the road to Haran that if the God of my fathers would bring me back to my father's house in peace then should he be my God. As if my vow would influence the creator of the universe! As if

a man could find and come to his God except through life, through suffering and learning, through struggle! Still I wanted to be certain that I would come to Canaan in peace. So as I wrestled I cried to him, Let me know you now. Tell me, who and what are you? I know what you are not. You are not a lump of clay like Laban's gods—although in every clod of earth I have seen your wonders. Yet no plainer than Laban's stupid idols do you speak to me now in my need. How then is a man to know if what he has done, or is doing, or will do, is good or evil—especially when it is for his self-preservation that he acts? And if he has once done wrong out of youthful ignorance or fear, can he ever repair what he has done, since the effects of a man's doing go on and on like the circles in water where a stone has been cast? And where does a man's responsibility for his behavior end, and where does nature's end? Must we learn only from the consequences of our fumbling and irrevocable acts—after reward or punishment? How can I know now how to approach my brother Esau? Who will tell me now with certainty whether my deception of him was an evil deed for which I must now suffer his just vengeance, or if my conflict with him has indeed been a struggle between what is for good and what is for evil in our world—a conflict in which I must surely triumph? And why—if my will to beneficent peace is good and his will to terrible warfare is evil—why must I find myself and mine in this dreadful dilemma, between the evil that is Laban's and the evil that is Esau's, in order that some good may ultimately come to mankind; while the Labans and the Esaus, unrestrained, ceaselessly cover the fair earth with their greedy and heartless oppression, their terrible violence and slaughter? . . . All the night I wrestled with my creator, held fast with all my might, and

questioned him. And though to my many questions I got few answers, yet at the end, when weary and faint I looked upon the dawning day, he renewed my hope and faith in my own powers: He blessed me, assuring me again that I should be fruitful and multiply, that I should be the father of nations; that leaders of men would come from my loins; as if that were really what I had sought. Yet when I think of it now, is it not this that we really want, is it not to this end that we ask our questions? All my questions he did not answer. Nor has he answered them to this day. And if you, my son, should ask of me now the questions I asked of my God in those dark hours I could not yet, for all my wrestling with him, answer you fully.

Your great-grandfather, Abraham, were he living, might better be able to answer you for I have never heard that Abraham had any doubts about his God, or in fact any occasion really to wrestle with him, whom he apparently could haggle with and wheedle into seeing things his way, if that old account of the matter with the Sodomites is reliable. And from that as well as from my mother's interpretation of the incident of the sacrifice of the scapegoat it would appear that it was Abraham who first taught his God mercy to mankind, and not Abraham who went asking questions of his God.

My childhood memory of Abraham is of a grey-bearded wizened old man with remarkably bright eyes in a face that was always gentle and peaceful—even in the most trying times—as if he were perfectly informed of and prepared for all human perplexities. Unfortunately I did not ask him about God, one of the few things I was not yet curious about at that early age. In his prime a robust

and restless man—from whom I apparently inherited more of the latter than the former characteristic—Abraham left Haran and set out for Canaan in search of his God and the destiny of his people; and from all accounts he found both. I, when I left home, went in search only of my own destiny; and it was only in Haran that I learned I must also make mine the destiny of all my kind. On the way to Haran I had turned to my creator only out of a youthful and arrogant ambition; but on my way back it was out of a mature and desperate need.

I have thus in my time both bargained and wrestled with my creator. I have approached him in my dreams; I have brought him down to earth in my desperation; and I have felt myself godlike—as on that fine day when you were conceived, and on those days in Haran when I delved in the laws of nature and perceived how with knowledge I could influence the processes of creation. And if you should ask me now how you can best know your creator, my answer must be that it is in your own questioning, in your curiosity and aspiration, in your probing and grasping of the creative forces around and within you—that in your dreaming and in your wrestling you will approach your God; and that in your blood and bones and brain, waking and sleeping, he will move you to your thoughts and acts, to your life and your death. I am certain now that only within his own spirit can man hope to achieve that divinity which he has so foolishly tried and failed to reach by building one tower or another outside himself. And it is my hope and belief—for hope and belief are ever joined—that finally you, my son, and in time all men, will no longer have to struggle, to wrestle with your God; that having discovered that divinity within yourselves—not by mere faith but by knowledge—you will

then feel even more secure in the world than that faithful herdsman I met on the way to Haran who sang,

*The Lord is my shepherd;  
I shall not want.*

And then men, building great towers, will know that thus they are not reaching for God but are climbing heavenward with his might. Then there will be no confusion among men. And men will know the happiness that comes only in security. Even now whenever a man is happy he feels God is with him; and it is only when—but I am afraid that if I say any more of this I shall myself climb into a Babel. I had not meant to wander so far from my wrestling that night at the ford of the Jabbok.

By morning I was lame. Yet I did not let go until with the coming of the new day I had wrested the blessing of reassurance from my creator; then I rose up knowing that I had striven with God and with men and that I had prevailed. And I named the place Peniel because I knew that there I had truly seen *God face to face* and my life was preserved. And as the sun rose again upon me I went limping down to the ford thinking how unlike my youthful encounter with the God of my fathers on that journey out to Haran was this one. Then I had traveled in awful wonder, now it was in painful and fearful perplexity. Then in the arrogant aspiration of my youth I had dreamed of a radiant ladder to distant divinity. Now in my maturer intention my God came down to me and I struggled with him as man with man. Then in my eager ignorant search for security I had bargained with him for his support. Now in my wrestling with him I tested my own powers. Both times I came away with renewed

self-confidence, but then I had gone striding toward the bright beckoning future, now I was limping back to deal with the imperfect past.

I woke to the fact that a new day was come: the sun was rising; the rising wind tossed the night-stilled branches of the trees, adding its endless music to that of the irrevocable stream. Roused from painful self-absorption I became aware again of the eternal busyness of earth, and I heard a song:

*I will lift up mine eyes to the hills:  
Whence shall my help come?  
My help cometh from the Lord,  
Who made heaven and earth.*

And over the top of a hill came a herder and his flock spreading down upon the sunlit slope of dewy green grass. It might well have been the same herder I had met on my way out to Haran, his cloak was as tattered; but the years I had spent at Laban's had turned him into a grey old man though his eyes were as calm and as faithful as the other's, as calm and as faithful as the hills to which he lifted his eyes and sang.

I went down to the stream to wash, and saw in the shining water how I too, in those years I had spent at Laban's, had changed from a youth to a man in his prime although my eyes were the same, as thoughtful and searching as ever.

And I too, lifted up my eyes to the hills standing still and calm in their green raiment, stirred only by the morning breezes, standing still as they have stood for ages while men have swarmed and seethed in cities filled with their violence, their strife and their corruption. And my sorely tried and weary heart longed for peace. And I said



to myself, Why go on? Why not stop here and live the life of that faithful and enviable shepherd? Why not give up the restless dreams and aspirations which drive me to a precarious destiny? Why not learn from him his trust in the Lord, and settle here in peace?

But when I stopped the shepherd and spoke with him I learned that neither had he the peace which I had imagined was his; for his quiet life was troubled by the threats of Esau and his kind who went up and down the earth seeking whom they might devour, and preying upon the peaceful. And it was because of that incessant threat to his life and his peace that he lifted his eyes to the hills, that he turned for help to the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

And I saw then that no peace would be found on this earth until the men of good will have learned how to deal with the men of violence. And much as I longed for peace, there was my brother, Esau, to be met.

On the way to our camping place I resolved to say nothing to Rachel about how I had spent that night, since no woman, I thought, would understand a man's wrestling with his God. Just how women look upon their creator is part of that mystery of theirs which no man is ever likely to comprehend. Yet while men dream of their gods or wrestle with them, women seem to be able to deal with them much more easily. I had seen Rebekah, my mother, praying with tears in her eyes like a child begging for something. And I had seen Rachel, your mother, steal and hide her father's gods as if they were toys she had wanted. But I could not imagine any woman wrestling with any god, and I thought it unlikely that Rachel would see any sense in my doing so, so I decided not to bring the matter up with her.

And indeed, as I walked in the bright morning sun, in the memory of my desperate wrestling in the night it was as if I had been struggling only with the more doubtful part of myself; just as now in the light of my maturity it seems that in that youthful bargain I made with a distant God in a dream on the way to Haran I was merely egging myself on the way I wanted to go.

When I returned to the camping place all were still asleep. I tiptoed to where you, my child, lay swathed in warm blankets with only your bright head exposed, turned to one side. And seeing you there so healthy and happy a child, so fresh, so new, unspoiled, so right, I hated to touch you with the burden of my weariness, my fears and doubts, my lamentable lameness. In my heart was the fond vision parents have of their children; that somehow this beauty, this perfection, will remain perfect and uncorrupted, untouched by disillusion and suffering. Perhaps, I thought, if he were raised to be, like my brother Esau, a strong and violent man of this earth, devoid of fear and doubt, perhaps then . . . But I knew how absurd that was when I bent over you and saw your blue unblinking eyes wide open, shining bright like those of the birds which were piping in the trees. You were watching intently the rustling leaves and the rosy morning clouds drifting across the sky. But at sight of me your mouth broke into a wide sweet smile. I whispered some nonsense to you. You liked to be whispered to, and you smiled again and again, warming my heart, turning the tribulations of the night into a senseless nightmare. Yet what was the meaning of our communion which was such pure pleasure? No word was spoken. Man and child—we told each other nothing—nothing but that we gladly, happily saw each other again. And how rare and

precious is such a feeling between men! How wonderful it would be for men to meet so and smile upon each other, with gladness—not as men mostly meet, warily and on guard, but without guile or suspicion, as we met, my child, in the early morning of that day when I was to meet my brother, Esau.

I went to that meeting determined in my mind. Knowing that no man can avoid the consequences of his own acts; with or without his God he must face them. And it had been shameful, feeble, worthy of a Laban to go seeking in my distress for a power outside myself. A man's God to be with him must be within him. And in my wrestling I had learned my strength. I knew how I would meet my brother Esau. I would meet him with the strength of my spirit, with my mind; and if my wits would serve me Cain would not kill Abel this time. And I say to you now, my son, it behooves us, the gentle Abels, the peaceable Jacobs, to save ourselves from our violent brothers by those wits our creator has vouchsafed to us.

I am not forgetting, of course, the support of our women, of which I have spoken. And it occurs to me now that Abel had no woman—at least none is mentioned in the story they tell of him—a lack which may well account for his destruction. And incidentally it does seem ironic that those women who are—like my mother and your mother—apt to figure largely in the troubles we, Jacobs, make for ourselves should also act as instruments for our preservation. But you will find many such paradoxes in this life, I promise you.

Nothing in my life, however, was more paradoxical than my actual meeting with Esau.

I had sent all the household on before you and your mother and then hurried ahead to meet my brother. And

as he approached with his mighty men I bowed most humbly before him. You can imagine my surprise then when I rose up and saw Esau coming toward me not in anger but with words of welcome. I wondered that my gifts should have so easily appeased him.

He was bigger and brawnier than ever—he towered over me; a terrifyingly powerful man; but there were tears in his eyes! He embraced me, called me his brother, and remarked with admiration on the size of my family and the wealth I had apparently acquired. He congratulated me on having got so much from shrewd Laban; but I saw it was not with envy he looked on my good fortune since he, the successful warrior, was obviously far wealthier in his spoils than I; and he could, with his might, take more in far less time than I had got in twenty years with all my cleverness.

Yet when he demurred at accepting my gifts, saying, "I have enough, you keep what you have," I insisted that he keep them, feeling that though his powerful security made him magnanimous with me, it was better that he should be indebted to me for something. I insisted he keep them, but with the utmost deference, of course, being careful not to let him see that I considered myself in any way his better.

Esau watched with considerable interest as my household went by, first the handmaids Zilpah and Bilhah with their children, then Leah and her children, all the sturdy offspring of my lust, and finally Rachel with you, my beautiful and beloved son, all bowing most humbly as they passed him; except that Rachel, with her pregnancy quite apparent by then, returned Esau's stare with interest and that kind of fearlessness with which only a woman can look at a powerful man.

I was relieved to see him smile as he turned to me and said, "For a lad who used to be as finicky about women as you were, you have managed to get yourself quite a collection."

I told him how Laban, when I wanted only Rachel, had tricked me into taking the others, and had got me to work fourteen years.

Esau laughed. "Fourteen years for a woman!" And it was then that he said, "I always told you they were all alike, and you proved it. You couldn't tell her sister from her in the dark."

"Still," I could not refrain from objecting, "still you are wrong, Esau, in saying they are all alike. Rachel herself is not the same woman she was when I married her, and Leah is as unlike Rachel in spirit as, as . . ."

"As you and I?" said Esau. "And I am not concerned about the spirits of women. So all my women are alike; because I treat them all alike. And though your Rachel is a pretty attractive piece now, don't be surprised if you find some day that she gets to be so much like Leah that you won't know one from the other again." He laughed again, looking after Rachel who was attending to you while the other women set about making camp. "They will all be one to you," he added more soberly. "And if one of mine starts acting up and being different I beat her." His face hardened unpleasantly. "I can see your Rachel thinks herself cock of the walk; but that's your fault. The trouble with men like you, Jacob, is that you live with your women too much. You talk to them about their souls, and as a result they get to bossing you around the house with that spirit of theirs. I don't talk to my women; I only sleep with them. I leave them at home in

the morning; and where I spend my days fighting they can't butt in."

"You don't seem to think women are people," I said, thinking how scornful Esau would be of my having consulted Rachel and Leah about making this very journey.

"Of course they are people. But all people have to be beaten; unless you are willing to let them boss you around. Of course if you let them they'll try beating you. Give a woman her head and you're lost. Like most people she probably hasn't the strength to rule, and would rather be beaten and led, but if you don't hold the whip she'll take it, and she'll despise you for letting her. That's how people are . . ."

Yes, I thought, that's how all of us are: We ascribe to others such traits as will excuse our behaving to them as we do. Because Esau wants to beat others he believes that they want to be beaten or that they want to beat him. And how much simpler it made life to think so. How much simpler to beat Rachel when she displeased me than to argue and struggle with her spirit. I almost envied my brother's rough-shod way with women when I thought of that. But I also knew that it is because men of sensibility love their women and appeal to their spirits that they are preferred by them, as they are, for that matter, by all human beings, for a like reason. To be sure, among women as among all mankind there are weak and craven spirits who find a sense of security only in subservience to that domineering brute strength which wants no traffic with the feminine but that of the animal, and wants no traffic with his fellow men but that of the head of the herd.

And here it might be well for you, my son, to consider as I did then, how men differ in their approach to the spirits of women just as they do in their attitude toward

their fellow men. There was my father, Isaac, who though he was gifted with great spiritual vision yet lacked the strength to cope with the spirits of others: he closed his eyes to what my mother did and withdrew from the conflicts of men to write his contemplative poetry. Then there was Laban, my father-in-law, who spoke gently and sweetly to his wife while he did as he pleased, and considered mankind as a pasture to be entered by fair means or foul for the satisfaction of his voracious appetite for wealth. And here was my brother Esau, to whom his women and his fellow men were creatures to be beaten into submission to his power.

And considering all my wrestling with Rachel, as with my God and my fellow men, I saw how I differed from my father who was withdrawn, even from his God before whom he stood in awe and dread; and how I differed from Laban and Esau since my desire in my struggle was ever to embrace with love and for knowledge, and not for mere profit and power. And I looked at the hard, the ruddy and unfeeling face of my brother, and thought, surely it is no use to speak to Esau of my wrestling with God and with men, a wrestling not to defeat but to know—to join with and take into myself. Esau would not understand and would only despise that in me. For surely he has never spent wakeful hours in darkness and perplexity. Yet why did he weep when he saw me, I wondered. Why did he greet me with smiles? Why has he not taken vengeance on me and despoiled me, as he might have so easily?

To impress him, I told him of the work I had done at Laban's, the experiments and discoveries I had made, the secrets of nature I had revealed, the practical uses to which I had put them in feeding and breeding, the results

I had got in the quality and fertility of cattle. Esau's eyes lit up avidly and I thought, perhaps with knowledge I can win him to my side, perhaps to help me; for without his good graces I can hope to accomplish nothing in Canaan.

Esau looked eagerly at me and said, "I am glad to see you coming back to your own people, Jacob. It is too bad we got into difficulties over that silly birthright—although I must say it has served you well—and you had to go off and get mixed up with those people in Haran instead of staying in Canaan, marrying there, and strengthening our native stock. As a breeder of cattle I don't have to tell you what mixing breeds does to the strain. But you've come back better off than you went, and this little mixture of foreign blood can be thinned out in time. You can do a lot for me here in Canaan. You can help me in my wars on all the surrounding foreigners, especially on Haran when I get that far since you know the country so well."

As gently as possible I reminded Esau that he was himself of foreign blood, that our grandfather Abraham had come from Haran, and so had our mother.

"Let's forget that," he said, a little annoyed. "Anyone looking at me can see that I'm no dark-eyed foreigner. You can't trust them."

I might have pointed out that my own eyes were dark and that Rachel's were light; I might have said that in spirit he was remarkably like Laban of Haran in some respects; but I forbore, seeing that Esau was no more bound by logic or consistency than he had been as a boy, or than Rachel would be for that matter. You will find, my son, that few people, men or women, are bound by logic or consistency.



I told Esau that I wanted indeed to do a great deal for Canaan; that I had decided to return with just that in mind, but that I had no wish to engage in warfare, against Haran or any other people.

Esau looked at me with something like his old-time boyish disdain. "I see you haven't got over your dislike for fighting in all these years. It's a pity. But listen, Jacob, I'm not asking you to fight. You are a very clever man. Of course you have always been the cleverer of us, as I have good cause to remember." He laughed heartily but with a flinty look in his eyes. "But you have learned to put your cleverness to some practical use. So I think that you and I should get together. Come work for me: I assure you it will pay you even better than working for Laban. . . ."

I saw then why he had welcomed me. I saw that the deception which had given me my start in life and sent me off to my advantage still rankled in him and would always remain, although he made light of that birthright. Our father had said, *By the sword shalt thou live*, and Esau was indeed living by the sword; but our father had also said, *And thou shalt serve thy brother*; and Esau had not forgotten that, and I could not tell my brother and make him believe that nothing was further from my heart than that I should be his master. I wanted that no more than that I should serve him in his bloody and ruthless warfare. Yet he was telling me in effect that only so long as a Jacob may be useful to an Esau will he be safe with him. It was not my gifts which had appeased him and prevented his destroying me, as he had sworn to do when he was younger, but the possibility of subjecting my spirit to his will. For better than the destruction of what we lack and fear and envy is the mastery of it. And

as Esau went on speaking I was amazed to discover that just as I had envied his strength for the freedom it gave him he envied me my mind for its illimitable resources. ". . . and with your brains to help my might," said Esau, "I shall be invincible."

"But you are already that," I said gently. "And you know that above all I dislike warfare and bloodshed. I would not relish working to that end."

"I remember very well," he chuckled, "how you hated my hunting and tried to turn me to peaceful farming and shepherding." He looked at me quizzically. "How is it that with all that wealth you had the nerve to come within reach of my might?"

"You are my brother," I said gently.

"Yes, of course," he said impatiently, as if not wanting to be reminded, "but tell me now, why do you hate war—even when you know you can win?"

"Because I love life," I said.

"And don't you think I love life?"

"I wonder, Esau. Your own life, of course, yes, although I wonder a bit even about that; but in your warfare you wilfully spill the warm precious blood of living men in their flowery fields, you crush their strong bodies and quick brains, you befoul and destroy the homes and the happiness women make, and snuff out the little lives of radiant children. Violence and death are not hateful to you as they are to me."

"In violence and death," said Esau, "men are often great and glorious; you hate them because you are timid and fearful, and because you have other weapons than fighting for your survival; all the same violence and death are a part of life and it's every man for himself. Look there!"

We were sitting by the river. Its silken surface reflected the white and blue of cloud and sky; but looking down where Esau pointed into the dark brown depths I could see the fish chasing each other, the larger ones darting in among clouds of smaller ones, and when a great grey long-nosed scavenger came gliding by even the largest fish fled, some leaping clear of the water. And on the ruffled surface I saw one black beetle pursuing another for mating.

I said to Esau, "Yes, all my life I have seen and observed the incessant pursuit of one creature by another whether out of love or hunger or hate—and these impulses are often so close that any two or all three may become one. Yet I say we are not fish, nor beetles, nor birds, nor wild beasts. We are men. And our world is vast and plentiful."

"All the same," said Esau, "it is every man for himself. And you are too. You took from Laban what you wanted, if not by strife and bloodshed then by guile."

"I did not take from Laban. I took from nature, which is generous to those who come with knowledge. I made peaceably with the power of my mind wealth which Laban would otherwise not have had."

"Well, everyone is not as clever as you, Jacob. You are certainly to be admired for what you have accomplished. But I find it is easier to take by force what another man has made and I lack, than to make it for myself." And the tone of his voice told me how weak I looked to him, and reminded me that he could easily finish me off, too, if he wished. "And long ago I learned from you, Jacob, that when I want the food another man has, it is wiser to kill him and take it for nothing than to bargain with him for it." And his meaningful smile told

me that I was not without guilt for the violence of my brother's distrust of humanity. For just as Rachel had robbed Laban of his self-assurance by taking his senseless clay images, so I must have taken from Esau with that hollow birthright—for all his scoffing at it—something of his self-assurance; and he had made of might the main support of his life, while I was making mine of mind.

How deeply I had affected Esau he proved when I tried to tell him of my conviction that all men might live in harmony and peaceful co-operation if only they went to each other in good faith.

He laughed out loud. "You always did have funny ideas. But that must be a brand-new notion of yours, Jacob. I remembered when you approached me and our father in anything but good faith."

"But," I protested, "that was when I was young and weak and you were strong and it looked like the only way I could get anywhere!"

"And you were dead right, brother. And it is still pretty much that way. The weak haven't a chance unless they are clever, and the clever ones had better keep away from each other, as you learned from Laban; only the strong and the clever can get along better by working together. And that's why I think we had better get together if you're coming to Canaan."

"Of course," I hastened to assure him, "I should like nothing better than to work with you, Esau. Certainly I have had no ambition to become the master of any man. My main idea in coming home was that we might, by co-operation instead of competition, make more than enough for all of us so that there would be no need to despoil anyone."

Esau laughed indulgently. "You always were dreamy, Jacob; and for all your shrewdness with me and with Laban you still are. But I say, on the contrary, with your brains and my forces I can do more despoiling than ever—more than enough for the two of us."

I looked at my brother's face which, for all his hard red ruggedness, was a man's face not unlike my own; and I wondered how, on any fine day like this one, with white clouds sailing in the sunny blue sky, he would wilfully with his army go into peaceful places sowing death and destruction—slaughtering men, outraging their women, robbing and burning their peaceful homes. When I had seen him last he was only a lusty youth who liked hunting. Was it really I who by taking his birthright and blessing had turned him into this ruthless hunter of men? And was this then the significance of that birthright—that if a man gives it up he is like those creatures who would rather be fighting than loving each other and who gain no wisdom from living?

I tried again to tell Esau of my dream—of men, the mighty, the gentle, the wise and the simple, living and working together in peace, not warring, not competing with each other but co-operating to fight only the difficulties nature presents to the life of mankind—of a nation which would suffer no man-made calamities, no violence and suffering other than those inflicted by nature; and even those catastrophes would be mitigated by their combined wisdom. Thus all the peaceful and the enlightened working together would make a good life, and in time a still better life. And as I had no wish to be any man's master, so had I no desire to serve any one man but to work with and for all mankind. . . .

"But," Esau interrupted impatiently, "why worry

about the weak, the gentle and the simple? Why should we work for them? Are we their keepers? Do we fear them too? All the more reason for keeping them weak and simple. The world was made for the likes of us—the strong and the clever. And are you still trying to tell me we can trust others? After the way you yourself put it over on Laban so neatly, not to mention that crude trick you played on our father to my disadvantage!” He laughed. “Don’t you worry, Jacob, I’m not holding that against you. Because I know it is every man for himself in this world; except where two can give each other those advantages which cannot be taken. Like us. You can’t rob me of my strength and I can’t steal your brains. And we can get more together. But why share with the simple and the gentle? That means so much less for us. Oh, no! . . .”

And I thought I caught in Esau’s eyes a glimpse of the same deep steadfast fear, the same hidden insecurity I had discovered in Laban’s eyes; and that glimpse was surprising, even shocking, for until then I had believed that of all men Esau and his kind were immune from inner uncertainty. In our boyhood I had thought it was only the frailer ones, like myself, the Jacobs who felt insecure in this world. All the strong, like Esau, seemed fearless. And when I had got to know Laban, fat master of men, I still thought that men of might like Esau were never in doubt of their powers. But in that moment with my brother I began to suspect that all of us—Esau with his brute force, Laban with his selfish exploitation, and I myself, with my eager and cunning mind—were moved by the same profound and urgent need to overcome that gnawing sense of insecurity we all suffer, from that very first breath drawn with a cry outside the warm safety of

the womb. I saw then how each of us in his peculiar way hungers and seeks for security, with a hunger of the spirit as strong as and more persistent than even the hungers of the bowels and the loins—hungers which are themselves the mere servants of that primary hunger. For do we not, truly, eat that we may stave off death and dissolution—although in the eating it may seem to us that it is only the savor of the food we have desired? And what is it that we are really doing in the ecstasy of our fornications—which some would say is the object of all we do and dream—but trying again and again with desperate eagerness to climb back into the warm safe womb, while by our potency and our fertility we deny exultantly our incessant fear of extinction—life's fear of death?

I tried to say this to my brother, but he looked at me very much as he used to in our boyish arguments, with a look that was half suspicious bewilderment and half envy. "You still like fine words," he said, "like our father, who still spends most of his time making pretty poems about life and death. But if you think I'm not secure, Jacob, you're mistaken." There was a belligerence in his eyes now that boded no good for me if I did not hasten to agree with him, to reassure him—which I did.

But you, my son, will, I think, understand me; you will not think it mere fine words when I say that it is that basic insecurity of the spirit which drives the Esaus to the violent hatred of all who are strange to them. And it is that same insecurity, I say, which has brought men together in love or, at least, in some degree of trust with those who make their lives more secure, with their neighbors, and in their families, their cities and nations. And I say that this is not something we need be ashamed of.

For is it our fault that we find ourselves willy-nilly in so precarious a world?

It is no shame to me to realize that it is my desire to be safer in this world which gives me my intense curiosity to learn its laws and manipulate its forces to my satisfaction. Nor am I ashamed to admit that seeing in Esau a menace to me, a potential power for my destruction I ran to him crying, *We are brothers*, in the hope of saving myself from his violent might. I did not merely fear Esau. I still, as I had in my youth, loved and envied his strength. As much as he coveted my wits for his ends I coveted his might for mine. And I hated what he did with his strength because it might destroy me and mine. I wanted to turn him and his kind to peaceful pursuits because then only would I feel safe in the world of my fellow men, then only would all men feel at home in this world. I have said that it is not our fault that our world is far more precarious than it need be. For they, the Esaus who seek their security most violently, make us, the Jacobs, yet more insecure, driving us to seek every additional aid our wits can secure. For unfortunately a sensible mind does not give the illusion of security which a powerful body gives. Indeed, though it does actually enhance his powers, the mind of a man of sensibility is apt, if anything, to increase his sense of insecurity.

Of this I said nothing to Esau. But when he asked me what made me so concerned for the distress of others I confessed that, as in most men, my sympathy for the suffering of another was doubtless little more than a manifestation of my fear of finding myself in a like state. "But what is important," I said, "is not that, but my firm conviction that men need not be at war with each other to survive."



He did not understand that I was generalizing. "You have nothing to fear from me, Jacob," he reiterated. But then he added, "Although I don't mind saying I could have cheerfully killed you had I caught you before you left. Not only for cheating me out of our father's blessing. That was just the last straw. I had long resented your being Mother's favorite. I wanted her to love me too. Sometimes I wished I were smooth and slender and had your quick mind, and could speak gently and cleverly like you so that I would please her too!" He stopped and then spoke more gently, "I had a son who was like her and like you, smooth and slender and gentle-spoken; not fair like your Joseph but with dark silken curls. He was too frail. He died. . . ."

You, my son, had wandered over to us and were sitting nearby, playing industriously with your lettered blocks and talking to yourself, telling yourself over and over again what you were doing: "Now Joey makes a house, now Joey makes a big house . . ." For you had in the last month suddenly developed in speech—a flood of language had come, of growing sentences of abstract ideas. You looked up at Esau and laughed. "Is that sunny?" you asked him, for you still said s for f. He smiled at you and went on talking of the boy who died. . . .

And I thought, as Esau spoke, how difficult it is for men, even brothers, to know each other; how easy it is to assume that because a man is ruddy, robust, rude, and of few words, that he feels or imagines nothing, that he never suffers, never has spent wakeful hours in the night in anguish and wrestling of the spirit. And I wondered: Can it be that the hard, heartless man is one who is so fearful of suffering that he destroys the frail, the suffering, as one might destroy the carrier of a painful plague.

Perhaps, I thought then for the first time, perhaps Esau and I do not differ so much in our ability to feel as in the expression of our feelings, of our fears and our sufferings —just as animals differ: some hide their pains in patient silence, others howl and fight. That the characteristics of all beasts are to be found among men becomes evident if you look into the faces on any crowded city street, for you will see there the look of fox and wolf, sheep and rabbit and mouse. And anyone who has lived with an infant knows that something of the lion and something of the lamb are deeply implanted in all men, for he will have seen that angelic creature, smiling sweetly with warm little hands outstretched, turn to a howling demon, angry red and fierce, and stiff with rage.

I remember your almost ferocious animal play with a small toy dog you had got when you were less than a year old, how you dashed it around; and how in play with your mother you used to put your head down clawing and growling at her like a little bear and crowing with pleasure at her cry of pain when you hurt her.

There is need, to be sure, for such preparation for violent and powerful action in the development of men who needs must cope with the forces of nature, but does that mean man must needs fight man?

As I sat talking with Esau that day you, my child, came up to me saying, "Here's Daddy!" with love in your voice as you stroked my face with your warm sweet hand, cooing, "Oh, Daddy!" and "Lub Daddy" as you put your small arms around my neck to hold me tight. Then as, in my preoccupation with Esau, I did not pay much attention to you, you suddenly turned violently mischievous: "Spank Daddy!" you cried, pounding me hard with your tightly clenched fists.

Now this expression of your displeasure, like that of your love, you had learned, of course, from your parents. But if it depends entirely upon us whether you will grow up the kind of man who faces this imperfect world with violence or one who seeks with love and knowledge to better it I cannot say. But that difference is important. Even if it be true that basically all men feel alike, it is the nature of their behavior, of the expression of their feelings, which determines how they will live together, what sort of world they make.

And though I had discovered that my brother Esau was not unfeeling, I remained mistrustful of his impulses to violent action; and when he offered to accompany me to Canaan or to leave some of his men with me, I declined, as politely and humbly as possible, and begged him to go on his way leaving me to go mine at a pace suitable to my household—with Rachel pregnant, a young child to be considered, and the slow-moving cattle. And it was not without relief that I saw Esau riding away; for I knew that I had had no real influence on my brother's spirit and that so long as we were on the same earth my life would be precarious because of the violence of that spirit; that, so long as my brother lived, there would always be the threat of war between us, although I wished with all my heart that I could find a way to peace with him, and still hoped to find one when we reached Canaan.

All the same I congratulated myself on having been able to come that far unmolested by Esau, and when I went to Rachel to tell her he had gone I said, "I suppose if I hadn't worried all night and made all those preparations for his displeasure he would have destroyed us," and

then was amused to hear myself talking in her womanly way.

"But of course," said Rachel seriously. "All the same, I don't see why you didn't take his offer of protection and let him travel with us; it might have saved you some trouble on the way."

I tried to explain to her then how I felt about the unbridgeable and dangerous difference between my brother and me and my belief that the best thing I could do for the present was to keep away from him as much as possible. But Rachel insisted that there was no reason why I should not use Esau to my advantage; she said I was being impractical.

Her criticism was a bit irritating after my relief and self-satisfaction in having come safely through that first meeting with Esau. I needed approval; I wanted support then, not criticism. I tried to turn the criticism with a joke.

"I suppose you women would have found it much more exciting to be traveling with Esau and his soldiers."

Rachel smiled. "I'm sure the others would. But you don't think I imagine any of those brutes would be interested in me and my big belly."

"That wouldn't prevent you from being interested in them, would it?"

"No, of course not. But is it possible that you would be jealous of Esau, that you envy him his size and strength?"

"But of course I do. Suppose we had both come to the well that day you first saw me, which would you have chosen?"

"I should certainly have looked at him first; he is so—overpowering."

"And I didn't impress you very much."

"Not particularly at first sight. Why should you? I wasn't expecting anyone. It would have been different if it had been as it was with your mother when she first saw your father, the man she knew she was going to marry, the man she had dreamed of. That might have been very disappointing. As it was with me, I did not feel one way or another about you. I had no idea who you were, and though I liked your kissing me, it was—well—very gentle. And I didn't see why you wept at sight of me. It was only later, when I got to know you, your spirit, and especially your talk, that I fell in love with you."

As I have said before, there are times when even a lover and seeker of knowledge does not welcome the truth. And though it seems a small matter now, the knowledge that Rachel would have been drawn to Esau's strength before she could be won by my spirit was something I did not relish, particularly just then in that mood of uncertainty as to my ability to cope with my brother, in which he had left me. I said to Rachel, "Yet though you fell in love with my spirit, now that you've seen Esau's might, you think me impractical—not quite so smart, so able and reliable."

Rachel laughed; and I knew it was with good reason; but I wished she hadn't. She said, "I do believe you are jealous, Jacob, for all your reason! Of course you're as smart as ever, and a hundred, a thousand times abler than Esau. Still, I say it was impractical not to use his strength for your protection, because he is so much more powerful than you are. You must admit that."

But I was unwilling to admit that, and her assumption of it exasperated me. "So it seems to you, Rachel. But I think you are wrong. And I don't think you are in a position to charge anyone with being impractical, be-

cause had you been more practical yourself about the matter of your pregnancy I would have been less worried about how to deal with Esau."

Whereupon tears sprang to Rachel's eyes and I tried to repair the hurt I had done her, but it was too late. She wept, and cried that I loved neither her nor the child in her womb, that it was only my mirage of a new nation which possessed me now—and so on. I turned from Rachel with shameful anguish in my heart and the wonder that man could dream of finding peace and harmony on this earth when even between those who love each other and wish only for each other's welfare such disharmonies, such petty wounding warfare of the harassed spirit may arise.

And as we resumed our journey toward Canaan I thought how little lasting triumph there is for a man in his ability to wrestle with his God and with men, when he has wrestled with the elusive spirit of a woman; and I recalled, as if it were in a delightful dream, that optimistic vision of untrammelled youth—how, coming out to Haran, I had considered only the most pleasant and promising aspects of life; where men were in dreadful conflict I could ignore them, I could turn from them. Life then—in one's youth—was something you made for yourself, you patterned it after your own desires; taking from all its infinite possibilities what you chose. Then I was certain that a man had only to avoid those with whom he was at odds and make his life with those he loved to be happily at peace. And now it was painful to have Rachel, of all people, recall my weary mind and heart to the troubled and unsatisfactory nature of reality.

How kind nature is in blinding the bright eyes of youth to the fact that the struggle for happiness and peace, the struggle between good and evil, between men of good

will and men of violence, is incessant and not to be ignored; and that even with love peace and happiness are not easily attainable. For if a youth were able to perceive the inevitable wrestling in which life consists he might hardly find the will and the courage to continue his happy journey, to go on with his eager aspirations to their difficult rewards. And I do not hesitate to say this to you, my son, when you are young, because the nature of youth is such that he cannot really perceive and apprehend what he is not yet ready to profit by. In this it appears that nature sometimes deems it well to deceive the young, or, better said, to protect youth from knowledge—up to a certain point.

So if some of these things I say to you now seem insignificant, read them again some day when you are older and you may be astonished to see how meaningful time has made them for you. But if you wait too long their significance will be less useful than interesting to you.

And the reason for this, time and experience will surely make clear to you.

*...because he had defiled Dinah, their sister...*

I HAVE said little about your brothers, those sons of Leah, of Bilhah and Zilpah, who were conceived not, as you were, in love, and who for the most part got little of my spirit. And I should be inclined to say little more about them but for the certainty that you will inevitably have to deal with your brothers, as I have had to deal with Esau. And although what I have told you of my brother should serve you in your dealings with yours—since they are much alike in spirit—it may interest you and enlighten you about that spirit and the ways of your brothers to hear of an incident of their making on our journey to Canaan—an incident of which you can have no recollection. You may read elsewhere an account of this matter and find it exciting or revolting, or both—according to your taste. But in retelling it here I am concerned above all with its significance, since I am of the opinion that even in an account of the most revolting behavior of human beings—if it be truthful—some valuable human significance may be found and revealed in the telling.



With the thought in mind that if I were to accomplish my dream in Canaan I must first bring my own sons to my vision of life, I had zealously undertaken to teach and persuade your brothers to peaceful and honorable dealings amongst themselves and with other men, and likewise with women, who, I insisted, should not be used in the rude and beastly fashion of violent men. And it seemed to me that I had succeeded in winning your brothers toward my views.

We had managed to come in peace to the city of Shechem in the land of Canaan, and were resting outside that city. Your sister Dinah, Leah's daughter, went into the city and there chanced to meet young Shechem, who promptly fell in love with her—a happening I could very well understand, for had I not myself fallen in love at first sight of your mother, Rachel? However, Shechem was not a penniless wanderer willing to work seven years, and more, for his heart's desire, but the prince of a city, accustomed to having what he wanted. So in his impetuous passion he took Dinah, whom, to this day, I have never heard say anything which would indicate that it was against her will or wish. Nevertheless your brothers attacked and despoiled the city of Shechem and killed that estimable young man because, as they put it, he "defiled" their sister. And when I upbraided them they reminded me how I had taught them that the chastity of a virgin must be respected.

I have said that men can and usually do find reasons for everything they do, but I find it difficult to understand why most warlike men now deem it necessary to present such high-minded excuses as they do for their aggressions, when the real reason is so obvious, so old and so constant: namely, that they want something their victims

have got—whether land or wealth or what-not. My brother Esau was at least honest when he said, “It is easier to take by force what another man has made and you lack, than to make it for yourself.” But your brothers, of a newer generation, are not so crude as Esau; they would not admit that what really incited them was Shechem’s wealth.

And what makes their hypocrisy all the more transparent is the fact that poor Shechem, head over heels in love, had come to me begging for Dinah’s hand in marriage and offering a generous dowry for her; and that his father, Hamor, had also come with the proposal that we settle there and trade and intermarry with his people.

I could hardly resist the pleading of romantic young Shechem, who reminded me so much of my young self when I went to Laban asking him for Rachel; Shechem was so absolutely certain that the whole happiness of his life depended upon his having Dinah, his heart’s desire. I had no wish to deceive the lad, but I forbore to tell him, as Laban once told me, that he might yet find himself mistaken in that notion—that he might live to learn that Dinah would not always be to him what she was then, that she might even, some day, bring him not happiness, but unhappiness! I forbore to tell him so because I knew very well from my own experience how little effect my saying so would have on him in his state. I pitied and envied the boy.

As for his father, it was plain enough, to be sure, that Hamor, having seen our wealth, was not entirely altruistic in his invitation, by means of which he hoped to enrich himself and his people. But he meant to do so by peaceable means; and how much he valued such an alliance may be imagined in consideration of his prompt

and eager acceptance of the painful condition your brothers set for it: That Hamor, his son, and all the men of Shechem get themselves circumcised in conformity with our custom.

I was so moved by this mark of amity that I looked forward to starting there in Shechem the first of my community of nations dedicated to the peaceful brotherhood of all men.

But your brothers had spoken with guile. And let me warn you here that it is a mistake for men of sensibility to assume that their cruder brothers are incapable of a certain shrewdness which is as dangerous as their violence. I learned this, of course, from Laban.

So do you, my son, beware not only of the might but of the minds of your cruder brothers, dull as they may seem alongside your own mind. You are not safe with them if you stand in the way of anything they want, and especially when they know they have got something you want very much. That too I had learned from Laban. There are those who will counsel you that the best thing you can do is to train your spirit to such austerity that you desire very little in this world, and want nothing very badly. Then you will indeed be safe from the envious and greedy, the mighty ones who will have no cause to molest you. But I cannot counsel you so, my son. For me, to be devoid of desire is to be dead; to want nothing badly in this life—even what may make you unhappy—is to resign yourself to the tomb before your time. True it is that it is our desires, our aspirations—to happiness, to knowledge, to achievement—which make our lives precarious, but without them we have no lives at all. What then can I counsel you in this universal dilemma? That

you do not forego your desires and your dreams, but beware of those to whom you confide them, especially of those in whose hands lies their fulfilment. I had to tell Laban, of course, that I wanted his Rachel, but in my eagerness I was not wary enough of him to prevent his deception. Yet even with this advice, my son, I cannot guarantee that you will not have to suffer for your desires and your dreams; even the utmost wariness will not prevent that sometimes.

As for those unfortunate men of Shechem they, like most peaceable people, were not wary at all of displaying to your unscrupulous brothers their eagerness for what we had and they wanted: young Shechem for our Dinah, and Hamor and his men for our wealth; with the result that when Shechem and Hamor and their men had complied with my sons' demand and were not in condition to fight, Simeon and Levi, men of violence like my brother Esau, led your brothers in a surprise attack on the city of Shechem. They killed not only Shechem but Hamor and all his defenseless men; they seized all their cattle and foodstuffs and wealth, and made captives of their women and children.

I am not one of those people who profess to be able to distinguish between good and bad warfare, who say that good fighters are those who observe certain humanitarian rules according to which warfare should be regulated. And combatants when they make excuses for their brutal or tricky reprisals by pointing to the cruelty or unscrupulousness of their opponents seem to me as absurd as were your brothers when they said it was because Shechem had "defiled" Dinah, their sister, that they did this. For war between men, no matter how it is waged, is abominable. No matter how it is waged war will always

be dreadful. To speak of mitigating it is ridiculous; and for those who do engage in it to be anything but ruthless would also be ridiculous. Even I who detest war can see that. And if there were any excuse for what my sons did at Shechem then their way of doing it was certainly the best, the most successful. So do not listen to any man, my son, who criticizes not war but the way in which it is fought. For my part, after Shechem, I was all the more resolved to devote myself to finding and making a way of life in Canaan in which men need never resort to violence in their dealings with one another.

It was a brutal deed of my sons there in Shechem, and I, innocently thinking I was doing good, had been a party to its inception. Nor could I put a stop to it once it was under way; much as I abhorred what they were doing I could hardly make war on my own sons. But when I looked upon the foul thing they had done after all my teaching, I thought how like it was to the behavior of a child who, left unwatched, will break the careful training of its mother and befoul itself. And in my anger I might have fallen with violence upon Simeon and Levi were it not for the intercession of Leah who pointed out to me, for an example, the patience with which Rachel would take you up, my child, when she found you evil-smelling and incredibly besmirched from head to foot, your clothes, your hands, face and hair, and set about cleansing and training you again.

"You must be patient with them," said Leah. "Consider, Jacob, that, as in the case of your brother Esau, you may not be entirely without responsibility for the violent nature of your sons. Consider also that, such as they are, their brute strength has not been without value

to you on this dangerous journey on which you would doubtless have been beset by enemies were it not known that you were accompanied by such powerful and violent young men. And finally consider that it is of such as these, your cruder sons, that you will, for the most part, have to make the nation you dream of; for you cannot hope to breed a world of Jacobs to your order as you bred my father's sheep."

I could not ignore the truth of Leah's reminder that the man of mind is dependent upon the man of force in the present and also for the future he dreams of. I said I would be patient.

When I called my sons and upbraided them for what they had done to Shechem, for which our name would stink in the land of Canaan, they adhered to their flimsy, childish excuse about his having dealt with their sister "as with a harlot." How shocking Shechem's act really was to them may be judged from the fact that not very long afterward when we got to Eder, one of them, Reuben, made love to Rachel's handmaid Bilhah, the mother of his own brothers, Dan and Naphtali.

There was of course nothing to be done but to go on, patiently teaching them—just as your mother did with you—bearing in mind that it is the tendency of men from time to time to forget what they have learned and to befoul their way of life in a manner most beasts would hardly be guilty of. So I went on with my sons, considering how much I might be to blame for their backsliding since they had not been conceived nor nourished with my love, as you, my child, have been. I went on with them knowing that wherever the blame, whatever its source, this fearful thing, this violent spirit among men

must be coped with and somehow subdued. I went on hoping that my sons might still achieve in time the spirit of true humanity which was my dream; but I was not a little oppressed by fear of the enmity which their behavior at Shechem might have aroused in the places through which we had yet to pass.

*...for she died...*

THE JOURNEY into Canaan became a nightmare of anxiety. We passed through city after city distraught by the warfare of Esau's marauding forces.

But to my surprise I discovered that my fears for the effect of our reputation, resulting from the affair at Shechem, were unfounded. Far from increasing our danger, the terror aroused in other cities by the news of that dreadful attack had made them wary of molesting or even offending us. This was hardly the spirit in which I wished to be received on my return to Canaan, and it boded no good for my ability to approach my neighbors later with talk of a peaceful community, or a company of nations.

You can imagine that the anxieties of that journey were not mitigated by the condition of your mother, Rachel. Every day my harassed spirit was torn between tender concern for her state and irritation with her unbearably headstrong behavior; very much as my feeling for you was sometimes confused between your sweet childishness and that wild boyish wilfulness you were



beginning to develop. At the end of one of those days, when you seemed to be in a constant fret and revolt against something, when each feeding and even your play was attended by insufferable outbursts of violent temper, I would look with wonder upon you as you lay at long last asleep like a flushed cherub. So I would wake from anxious sleep in the night and look at Rachel, your mother, lying flat on her back because of the renewed mound of life in her belly; and she seemed sometimes as different from the Rachel I had loved and wanted as was Leah that first morning after Laban deceived me; and I would wonder if that Rachel whom I faintly remembered—the tender beloved virgin, the eagerly loving bride, the happily excited expectant mother of those first months before you were born—had ever existed.

But it was only the strain of this pregnancy, I would tell myself; when this is over and we are settled again she will return—that Rachel whom I loved. But I recalled then with clarity what Laban, her father, had said about a man being always deceived in marriage, about a man never really knowing whom he is marrying, about a man being lucky if he has ever—for so much as six months—known and possessed the woman he thought he was getting when he married. All this I recalled with fresh understanding as I looked upon Rachel's face in the night and wondered what profound change childbearing had wrought in her, so that she no longer looked lovingly to me for guidance, so that now there was hardly a wish or decision of mine which she found worthy of respect or concurrence.

We differed then even in the matter of our wishes for the child that was coming. I said that I had much rather not be bringing a child into a strife-torn world under such precarious circumstances as ours, but since it was coming

and since our life in Canaan would for some time be insecure, I hoped it would be a boy, a man child to strengthen our forces, rather than a woman, who needs, as my mother once said, a peaceful world.

But Rachel said no, she didn't want another boy. She would so much enjoy making fine pretty dresses for a little girl, she said, quite as if that were a reason of any great consequence! Nevertheless, when I smiled and said as much, she answered that my reason for wanting a boy appeared to her of no greater consequence; and if I thought the world was ever—in our time at least—going to be in a better state to welcome a child I was a hopeless optimist; and she spoke with such arrogant sarcasm that I felt there was no longer any real communication possible between us—that I must give up the idea of a unified life with a woman.

And that thought would fill me with the anguish of a profound disillusion, and I would look at you, my son, with envy, because of your complacent acceptance, without complaint, of the fact that in her preoccupation with the coming childbirth she no longer attended to your wants but left you to be fed, bathed or put to bed by others, and to shift a good deal for yourself, which you had begun to learn to do. I envied you your unconcern about the change in Rachel's attitude toward you; for except for those painful accidents when, unattended, you burnt, or cut, or fell and hurt yourself, you spent your days as pleasantly as ever, playing, singing, eating, sleeping. . . .

As for me, because I had failed to evoke again in Rachel that communion and ecstasy we had once had, I ate my heart out in those days, brooding over the realization that a man must resign himself to being always and forever

alone. . . . Although we are told that The Lord God before he made woman said, *It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him*, still you can take from the woman you love, as from all other beings, only what she wants to give you, and can give her only what she wishes to take. You may get love from others and sometimes give; but only momentarily, and even then mostly in an illusion, can you be one with another being, as when two friends see eye to eye, or lovers are joined in the fleeting ecstasy of the flesh. Except for such rare, evanescent and unreliable moments the spirit of man remains in isolation. And the plain and final fact is that from the instant when the umbilical cord is severed and he is pushed out of the womb a man's body is bounded by his own skin; his mind is locked inside his bony skull; his fumbling words and actions are incapable of transmitting more than the slightest part of his thought and inward experience; and he is doomed to essential loneliness. But man tries to forget and does transcend that fact; in friendship, in love, in his family and in his nation, in all those forms of human solidarity with which men on this earth have denied that man must live like the wild and solitary beast of prey in hateful warfare with all his fellows. . . . I saw all this, but it troubled me most painfully then that, having set out on this journey in the hope of making a better life with my fellow men, I should be finding it so difficult to achieve a peaceful and happy understanding with the one being I loved most dearly, and that, just when I most needed the support and consolation of her sympathy and understanding. . . .

Your mother's mood may, in good part, have been attributable to her own anxiety. The child in her womb had

taken the breech position; and though by manipulation the head could be turned downward it returned each time to the less favorable position. This might well have worried Rachel, for though in her first pregnancy—with you—she had been so confident that one would have said she had been through it all before, this time she had that previous experience for comparison, and the difference was marked and disquieting.

It is part of the incredibly capricious character of nature that none of its performances is ever repeated precisely, despite infinite repetition. Just as no two blades of grass, let alone two faces, are alike, so are no two of the myriad births accomplished exactly alike. But if your mother was anxious about this difference she said nothing about it, she suppressed that anxiety so that there was no sign of it except, possibly, as I have said, in this arrogant contentiousness. Yet despite the hardships of the journey and this untoward sign in her womb she appeared to be herself not disconcerted, she seemed just as pleasantly preoccupied and engrossed in the event within herself as she had been with you the first time. She discounted my fears that travel was hastening the delivery and that we would not reach Bethlehem in time, where she could have competent assistance.

"You worry too much, Jacob," she said, "about everything."

"I worry more than you only because my imagination is more active; I look ahead and try to prevent the evil that may happen, rather than ignore the possibilities and then try to undo or correct what has happened."

"Would you say I wasn't looking ahead when I took father's gods?" She began to bridle, ever on the defensive now at the suspicion of criticism.

"No," I hastened to say. "I have to admit that there are times when you act intuitively as if . . ."

"When I do it, it is intuition and when you do it it is imagination. Well, call it what you will, Jacob, it comes to the same thing. The only real difference is that I do it only when I know it will do some good, and you do it all the time."

"Now, Rachel, I don't want to argue but really I don't see how you can know definitely in advance when prevention is possible and when not. And besides, if you believe in prevention why not be consistent and take precautions all the time?"

"Because prevention isn't always possible. Of course you don't see how I know when it is possible. And neither do I. I just know when it is so; when something tells me. And your virtue of being consistent for the sake of being consistent doesn't interest me in the least."

"But you don't understand, Rachel. It isn't merely for the sake of consistency. I believe in living carefully because life is dangerous. Often we cannot undo our errors; sometimes the lack of a little foresightedness kills us."

"Well, I say there is a point beyond which it doesn't pay. And because mostly we cannot undo our errors, it seems to me that we might as well forget them and let the future take care of itself."

"But, don't you see, that's just what most people do and that's why so little is learned from experience. No problem should be forgotten until it has been solved. Only then can it be safely put aside."

Rachel shrugged her shoulders impatiently. "Being careful has become a bad habit with you, Jacob, perhaps because you were a delicate child and your mother pampered you."

You, my son, looked up at us from where you were sitting at play, and the tone of your mother's voice must have meant something more to you than our words, for you turned to your solitary game admonishing yourself as Rachel was wont to admonish you. "Joey!" you cried, "You mustn't do that. It's naughty!" And though I wondered, with a bit of embarrassment, how their incomprehensible parents must look and sound to such young observers, the fact that I myself harbored from that time of my life no really distasteful recollection of similar visions of Isaac and Rebekah, my own father and mother, made it possible for me to continue that talk with Rachel.

"I suppose," I said, "you would like me better if I were reckless like my brother, Esau."

"There you go envying Esau. You know very well I wouldn't like you at all if you were like Esau. You know very well that I love your thoughtfulness. I'd hate being Esau's wife. He probably makes love like a bear, and beats her; although I'm sure men like you are much more difficult to live with. You don't beat us as the Esaus do, but you make greater demands of us, you expect much more of a woman than Esau could possibly imagine. You know I love you, Jacob, even when I don't agree with you. Or maybe a man can't understand that: maybe the trouble is that a man can't love a woman—or anyone else for that matter—unless she agrees with him. I love you all the time. But don't expect me to be just like you because I love you. I suppose that would be logical, wouldn't it? If I love you I should want to be like you, you would say. Well, I don't feel that way about love. So don't expect me to be as careful and as foresighted as you are. It just isn't in me. And don't you worry about this birth any more. Here I am, and the baby is staying in place now, and it will

come out in its own time and everything will be all right." Then she kissed me heartily and made me feel how the child in her belly had settled head downward into the pelvis, had dropped down into the proper position for delivery. And she made me feel that I had indeed been unnecessarily anxious.

And when labor began it looked as if she had been right, although it was, as I had expected, ahead of time. We were still two days' ride from Bethlehem. The labor though hard and painful was short, and the delivery swift with a great gush of blood.

The child was a boy, not smooth and prettily finished as you were, Joseph, but beet-red and wrinkled, as if prenatally aged. "It would be a boy," whispered Rachel, smiling ruefully, her face still wrung with the sudden agony she had withstood. "That's because I made a couple of dresses. I just had to. Anyway, you see?—there was nothing to worry about."

But there was, for the blood continued to flow from her, sometimes slowly, sometimes with a rush, despite all efforts to stanch it. It was as if the child in its premature departure from the womb had broken and left open the gates of her life's blood which escaped. Sometimes it trickled, sometimes it pulsed like a fountain.

I had seen this happen with my stock; and rarely had they survived. Quickly I tried every remedy and device I knew and could contrive there by the roadside, but nothing availed. The red blood ran from her.

Her face and her hands turned waxen yellow. A frightened look came into her trusting and confident eyes. The hand of death seemed surely set upon her stricken face. But I knew how narrow is the line between life and death, how quickly and surely death can strike and yet

how close to death the living can come and still survive. Only the week before I had seen how you, my child, from having eaten something disagreeable, were taken sick: suddenly, with a violent retching, you turned from a bright-eyed boisterous child to a deathly waxen image, lying there languid, frightening in your pitiful immobility: and then, how quickly, after you had been purged, how miraculously you had recovered, returned as if magically to irrepressibly joyous life! I had seen then how precarious a thing is the body's health, how quickly the seemingly quenchless vigor can be snuffed out; but I had seen too how close death can come to life and yet not overcome it.

I redoubled my efforts to bring Rachel out of the languid indifference which was falling upon her. I prayed my God, desperately, for the life I had loved—I promised everything—all the fruits of my past and my future, not merely a part; I was not bargaining now with the naively self-centered youthfulness of that lad going out to Haran; I humbly offered everything for my heart's desire.

But the blood continued to drain from Rachel, leaving her face and hands a ghastly grey. She saw the sweat pouring down my face as I worked to revive her beloved spirit; and she begged me not to worry. "Why do you worry, Jacob? You worry too much. It will stop. Everything comes to an end." Her voice was remote and strange, unrecognizable. Tears streamed down her cheeks, now drawn and hollow.

It was as if everything I did only made matters worse. A cry broke from my lips. I cursed the day I had left Haran with my dreams. I should have stayed in comfort with Laban.

"But it isn't your fault, Jacob," she said faintly through



fading lips. "I should have told you I was pregnant, but I saw how your heart was set on going. Anyway, it might have happened there too; it isn't your fault."

Cold sweat broke out on her wax-white brow and I begged her not to speak, to save her breath. She looked pitifully lost, confused, worn and weary and helpless, neither like the radiant Rachel I had loved and married, nor like the arrogant and contentious woman of these last few months, but like a fast ageing and unlovely creature. The beauty was gone from her body too. She looked suddenly not unlike Leah, her sister.

She knew the end was coming, and I saw that it was indeed so. In the agony of remorse I cried out that I was surely to blame, I who preached prevention and care and reason, yet had that night let myself get into the state of not knowing what I was about. I cursed the day I had left my father's house to come to Haran and bring her to this pass.

She smiled gently and whispered, "Hush, Jacob, you are always saying someone is to blame. As if that mattered. No one is to blame. It had to be so. This is my destiny. You had to come to Haran. And I had to come to meet you at the well. Remember, Jacob?"

"Yes, Rachel, I remember," I said, though the memory was as faint, as remote, as her voice.

"And we did have wonderful times. And that night you were drunk you were so sweet, Jacob, so funny—never had you been so. And you will miss the Rachel you loved, who was your heart's desire, won't you? You will weep for her a little. And Joseph will weep for her too, as you wept for your mother that fine day on the beach when he was conceived. . . ."

Her voice trailed off; and in a desperate effort to rally

her I brought her the new-born baby. He was asleep, with that bland, blank, lifeless look of one just out of the womb, not yet come to life. On his head were still bits of Rachel's blood. His face, just wiped of its bloody veil, revealed his small clay-like, as if unfinished features. His tiny bird-claw hands were clutched tight.

In her deathly face Rachel turned her tearful eyes from him to me and said, "You wanted another boy, didn't you? I knew all along it would be so. It's a man's world. Men get what they want." She tried to smile. She looked again at the child. "He's not as pretty a baby as Joseph was; he has not had so good a start." She whispered sadly, "Call him Benoni—son of death."

"No, Rachel," I cried and grasped her pale hands which were hot as if aflame. "Nothing comes of sorrow and death. I am for life, for a good life. And Rachel, my beloved, will live, and this child shall be called Benjamin—son of the strong right hand . . ."

She smiled, a wry and pitiful smile. I had to lean over her to catch what she said with the last of her breath: "All right," she panted, "call him Benjamin. I won't argue with you any more, Jacob. From now on you shall have your way. Benjamin, son of the strong right hand, shall live. But let this be the end of deception for you and for me—you who deceived your father and were deceived by mine—and I who deceived my father and have been deceived by this birth which is my death. For the Rachel you loved so well cannot live, Jacob. Good-bye, my darling." Breathless, she closed her weary eyes. For a long time she lay still, and the hand I held tightly turned cool, as if slowly withdrawn. The face of the infant beside her flushed into peaceful smiling sleep; while her white face faded, changed on the pillow as if a hand had passed

over it, smoothed it; and when I looked at the dead it was the lovely face, remote and dreamlike, of that slender virgin, Rachel, the girl I met long long ago at the well, and loved so passionately. And I knew finally that Rachel was right—the Rachel I loved so well, my heart's desire, was gone. And in that moment something in the heart in my breast was destroyed; yet I could not cry out.

Then in my silent anguish I heard the sound of sobbing and looked up. And there in the doorway a woman stood weeping and holding you, my son, by the hand. You wept too, and hid behind her skirts. And when I looked at her face, at the tears streaming down her drawn cheeks, for a moment I thought, it is the suffering Rachel risen again. But she cried, "The Rachel you loved is dead." And I saw it was Leah; and she was weeping not for the dead but for me. For Leah, trying to assuage my unspeakable suffering, said, "Oh, leave the dead, Jacob."

"Weep for the dead," she said, "but return to the living." And she took up the infant Benjamin, who had opened his beady blue eyes and was wailing.

Then I, too, wept.

*...And Jacob set up a pillar upon  
her grave, the same is the Pillar of  
Rachel's Grave to this day...*

THERE by the side of the road to Bethlehem I lost and left forever the sweet body and spirit of that woman whom I had so greatly loved; and there I set up a great stone and a tomb; I built a domed room to house my desolation. And in that room, alone with the irrevocable, my spirit cried out in bitter resentment against this callous indignity of nature, extravagant, profligate, impersonal, which holds in such contemptible insignificance all the pride and the pain, the ambition and anguish, the love and very life of man.

And then it came to me that for this indignity man alone of all living creatures has a compensating choice: he can will to live or to leave this life. Ineluctable death is indeed the bitterest indignity his proud spirit suffers; but a man need not wait for death, he can take it when he will. Nor need he suffer the pain and anguish of deprivation and affliction; in death he can terminate them at his will. And so tempting was that thought, that in my despair, alone in that desolate room, I might indeed have

acted on it one day were it not for the sound of a voice outside—your voice, my child, raised in inconsolable lamentation.

You had been playing with your blocks. With these you had learned by then to erect very elaborate structures which you called “houses,” with “doors” and “windows,” “steps” and “steeple” and “chimneys,” and you would sit, absorbed by the hour in arranging and rearranging these to suit your changing design, saying, “Now Joey takes this red one and this green one . . .” And then, “That’s better,” in a childish solemn voice of decision, only to take it all apart again to try something still more ambitious. But since they were sometimes precariously founded your buildings were apt to collapse; and each time this occurred you still burst into indignant childish outcries while you knocked down the ruins and cast away the offending blocks until your mother would come to comfort you . . . It was in such a state that I found you and it was in vainly trying to appease your destructive and rebellious anguish that I forgot my own self-destructive impulse.

But in the bleak days that followed there were times when you brought back too sharply the painful image of my loss. As when happily unconcerned you sat in the sun talking and playing with your toys and, having broken something, you cried out, “Joey, you silly boy, now see what you’ve done. You mustn’t do that any more! It’s naughty, Joey,” mimicking precisely the tone and cadence of Rachel’s reproving voice. Or as you climbed about: “Be careful! Joey will fall down!” Or “Mother’s cross with you! Now stop that, Joey!” as you proceeded to do just what you had been forbidden—to pour water on the floor or to take off your shoes. And with the sun-

light shining on your fair face and hair you were radiant, illumined from within as was Rachel when I first saw and loved her, and your bright eyes when you looked up and smiled to me in all innocence were Rachel's eyes; and I saw her again as she lay on the green grass with you, playing, her fair face close to yours, her eyes and yours alight with delight, and bright with innocent beauty as you laughed together. And I thought: It is no wonder that my father Isaac looked upon his creator as a jealous God; for only a jealous God—jealous of his creatures' approach to perfection—would destroy so lovely a thing, would take from a man the ideal for which he had dreamed and worked, to which he had devoted so many of the best years of his life.

I could not bear to leave the lost Rachel there, buried under the stone in that domed room. I lingered there by the road, dreaming how she would rouse herself, would rise up and return to me, beautiful and loveable as she had once been.

I made every excuse not to proceed on my journey into Canaan to the house of my father, until Leah came to me and said: "Have you forgotten, Jacob, the great thing you dreamed of doing when you determined to leave Laban in Haran? You must not forget the needs of your fellow men: you must try to forget your private grief. And there are the children to be considered, they should have a home, a quiet peaceful place where they can feel secure. Joseph is not himself, and Benjamin has a weakness in his groin that appears when he cries." She brought both of you to me. And I saw that although you, Joseph, were as bright, as active and playful as ever, and were growing fast, your looks were changing, you were too thin, your cheeks were no longer round, your lips were pallid,

your hands and legs looked frail, your body was bony and your fair skin flawed by sores as if something insidious within you were eating away at your flesh. You too, I thought, although you said nothing, were unreconciled to the loss we had suffered. And when I turned my attention to your younger brother, I saw in your look and manner the signs of your jealousy of him for the attention he was usurping, which was not unlike my jealousy of you in those first days when you were usurping my place with Rachel. And I saw how early a man must needs begin to learn, however reluctantly, that he is always being supplanted, until he comes to that last planting when he will be forever in the darkness while others flourish in the sunlight above him.

As for little Benjamin, small and raw-looking like something unfinished, yet wizened like a little old man, I could feel nothing but pitiful anguish at his advent which had destroyed the Rachel of my heart's desire. And I thought how different was the reception you, his first-born brother, had got into this same world; and how the love-intoxicated man, in the ecstasy and exaltation of his creative potency, can forget that it is to inevitable suffering and death he is inviting his own creation. And as if he sensed that melancholy thought Benjamin's homely little face reddened and he began a loud hopeless bawling, while Leah showed me the rupture, a large lump where his intestine was pushed down into his groin. It was as if that last detail, that small sustaining diaphragm, had not been properly finished before he had been jostled into this world, prematurely pushed out by our journeying along the rough road to Canaan. And though that might be Rachel's fault or mine, it certainly was no fault of his, poor little beggar, I thought; and asked Leah to bring me

some yarn with which I showed her how to fasten a little truss with a knot adjusted to retain the rupture, cautioning Leah to keep him trussed at all times, and prevent his prolonged crying until the opening had had time to tighten and the tissue to strengthen. There was thus a chance for the weakness to adjust itself, as I had observed it had in some cases among young animals. Whereupon Leah, although she knew absolutely nothing definite about such things, assured me cheerfully that I need not worry. "I'm sure it will be all right as soon as we settle down," she said, with an air of feminine finality so like Rachel's that I turned from her with impatience, and gave orders for the resumption of our journey.

But early the next day as we rode away I was loath to go on, still thinking of the lost Rachel, my heart's desire, in that solitary tomb by the roadside. I could not give up the dream which had once been real. Life without that dream was without savor. My great plan was merely a great labor, a joyless and thankless undertaking. As the bright white dome dwindled away in the distance tears came to my eyes; and I looked with painful and envious wonder at you, my child, who, apparently unmindful of the change in your mother—the change from Rachel to Leah—were playing some little instrument I had got you, singing and swaying to the music as we rode away—singing,

*"Three blind mice,  
See how they nice,"*

with mischievous merriment in your eyes for your ability to alter the old song, and to make it rhyme for you.

Then Leah, riding beside me, said something surprising, "Listen, Jacob. Listen to me. By the time she has had two



children every woman dies—in a way. Take my word for it; that is our destiny.”

“It is odd,” I said bitterly, “how you women talk about destiny as if you believed in it, yet you are forever meddling with destiny, your own and that of others.”

“But Jacob, how is that different from what you do, who discover what you believe are nature’s unchangeable laws yet are always trying to make the forces of nature serve your needs? The fact that a man is, in many ways, fate to a woman does not prevent her from trying to influence him somehow. You believe a man can influence the lives of his fellow men; that’s what you’re hoping to do in Canaan. Well, so do we. But we keep in mind that there are limits to what we do—the limits nature has set, or the unchangeable results of our own doing. That’s what we mean by destiny. Being a woman, it was the destiny of the Rachel you loved that she should want to bear your children, and that in bearing them she should die, should be lost to you. Just as, being a man, your wanting to return to Canaan to take up again that old conflict with your brother, by setting up your peaceful way of life against his violent one, is part of your destiny. It may indeed destroy you but . . .”

Listening to Leah I perceived how thoughtful men are deceived by the clarity of their own vision into thinking that this vision may be relied on to lead them to wise and decisive action. Time teaches such a man that all his advantage over his thoughtless brother is that he can see life’s complexity, its infinite and tormenting chances.

“ . . . while most women survive that ordeal we are not the same ever after—not at all. None of us. The Rachel you loved at the well was gone anyway, Jacob. You’ve known that but wouldn’t admit it. Nor am I the woman

who deceived you that first night. If you had paid some attention to me, you'd know that too."

I looked at Leah. Her eyes were stronger than they had been; not as bright and beautiful as Rachel's, but firm, very gentle, tender, very kind and understanding. I recalled again what Laban had said: "The woman you married will be gone. Just you wait and see."

"Your father once said something like that," I said. "He said that every man marries at least two women and often more, when he thinks he is marrying only one. On that score he argued that he hadn't really deceived me when he sent you to me instead of Rachel."

"And my father was right, in a way, wasn't he?" she said smiling. "It is so hard to know sometimes if one is being deceived or being shown the way to the truth. And although I didn't deliberately put him up to it, I suppose I am responsible for his deceiving you. He did it for my sake. I guess in one way or another women are responsible for a good deal of the deceit men practise on one another. Didn't your mother get you to deceive your father and your brother; and didn't Rachel—although you were not aware of it at the time—get you to deceive my father in the matter of his gods? Why, they still say that Eve, the mother of all women, made Adam try to deceive the God of all men."

"Although I must say it often looks to me as if men want to be deceived; at least they are often not aware that that's what they really want. And their God too; else why did he put the tree of the knowledge of good and evil into the garden of Eden? He could have left it out and Adam would have remained as innocent as the day he was made. And I remember that day on Mount Gilead, when you and my father were making a covenant and setting a

boundary between you, I got the feeling that he was rather relieved at the way it had turned out; you would always be a dangerous nuisance to him with your brains and, having got so much out of you, he was in a way well rid of you. I've often thought he could have made Rachel get off that couch if he had really wanted to. Of course I don't mean to imply that when my father deceived you with me you had also wanted to be deceived."

She glanced at me mischievously; and I had to laugh. "I didn't have that feeling, I'm sure," I said. "I suppose it is always the deceiver who gets that impression because that's what he wants to believe. I had it with my father when I deceived him; and I am not surprised that you had it with me, since it was not until morning that I made the discovery. Anyway I have never thought of blaming you, Leah, for that deception; and at times I have felt I could hardly blame even your father."

Leah laughed good-naturedly. "I guess only our creator can be called to account, who in planning his destinies saw fit to make me so homely that it took a deception to bring you to me."

"I wish," I said bitterly, "I wish we could really call our creator to account for all the unhappiness we have to suffer for those destinies of his. I would ask him why the Rachel I loved had to die."

"You mustn't talk that way, Jacob," Leah reproved me. "The trouble with you men who have come close to God in your studies and have wrestled with him and wrested from him his secrets is that you make demands of the life he has given you. You feel yourself so close to divinity that you think you have a right to insist on the good life you want. You go to God almost as arrogantly as your brother Esau goes to his fellow men. And when

life does not come up to your expectations, when it hurts you, you are disappointed, you are pained and outraged, you want to know why. You think that because your creator has given you the power to dream he must also fulfill your dreams. Well, all I know is that it just isn't so in this life. And whenever I get any one of my dreams I am grateful." Her gentle chiding and friendly frankness were touching and comforting.

"And what was your dream when you came to me, Leah?"

"You would never guess it, of course, but my dream was that though I had no beauty I might know something of the love of a man like you, a lover of beauty." She covered my hand with hers—not silken soft and smooth like Rachel's; it was rough; worn but warm, and strong.

I was ashamed. "It was not much I gave you, Leah," I admitted.

"It was much more than you knew, or cared to give me. Often without trying one gives another far more than one wants to, just as, often, for all the trying one gives far less than one wants to."

"Lord knows you have given me enough," I said earnestly, "far more than I have deserved of you."

Her eyes twinkled. "Far more than you realized, Jacob. But the one thing I wanted most to give you I couldn't."

"And what was that, Leah?"

"A son who would be like you in spirit, another Jacob. And had you loved me as you loved Rachel, I think my sons too would have been Jacobs instead of Esaus. For had you loved me you would have loved them too, and would have given them your spirit."

I smiled. "It's a pretty notion, Leah, that the spirit in which a man approaches a woman has some effect on the

nature of her offspring. My mother had some such notion too. She thought the difference between Esau and me was accountable by the fact that my father half loved and half resented her for taking his mother's place. But do you really think the seed a man sows in the woman's body knows anything about what is going on in his mind and heart?" I could not help thinking, however, of the difference in the spirit of your conception, Joseph, and that of your brother Benjamin, and then of your perfection at birth and of his imperfection. "Then you would say," I scoffed, "that because I was not as happy with Rachel when Benjamin was conceived that it is doubtful if he will be as much like me in spirit as Joseph?"

"I wouldn't say it is doubtful," she said, quite seriously. "For the seed," Leah spoke quietly, but with conviction, "the seed of a man may not know, but it must surely feel different when he goes to lie with a woman he does not love with his spirit—when he goes to a woman only in the heat of his lusty body as animals go to each other. How can the seed then feel other than as the seed of beast? It is then that the Esaus are born. The Jacobs are the products of love."

"If what you say is so," I said, "the proportion of Esaus to Jacobs among men does not speak well for the amount of love that goes into the begetting of mankind."

"It certainly does not," she said gravely, "and I guess that's why the first-born is given the inheritance and the blessing. He is most likely to be conceived in love and be the better man."

I laughed at that. "I suppose you will say that Esau and I are a special case. But how do you account for Cain and Abel?"

"Well, Adam was angry with Eve for all the trouble

she had got him into and Cain was conceived in his first fierce lust. But Abel he conceived when he was reconciled to his fate, and he had learned to love Eve. Adam had to learn love. Love can be learned, you know." She smiled, but tears stood suddenly trembling and twinkling in her eyes, and as suddenly I remembered my mother arguing with my father. And in that moment Leah was so much like my mother that I truly loved her and wished with all my heart I could make her happy; and it seemed that if I went to her then, loving her, she might—if there was any truth in what she believed—conceive a son who would be another Joseph. But though in that moment I loved her yet she was so much like my mother that I had no lust for Leah; and then too I remembered that Leah, having suffered the change of a woman's life, would have no more children, and I was very downcast for her and for all womankind whose fate she shared.

But she smiled and went on, "And even if a man's seed can know nothing of what is in his mind and heart, the children of his seed are not unaffected by his feeling for their mother. The children of his lust he lets run wild, but he teaches his spirit to the children of his love, he instills it in them. Anyway this much I claim: that were it not for me none of your sons would have been like you. Had I not given Rachel my mandrakes you would never have had Joseph, whose beautiful spirit is so like yours that I love him better than all my own sons. Surely you don't mind my having meddled with destiny then."

"But surely you don't think the mandrakes did it. I really thought you were more sensible, Leah; I see you can be just as romantic as Rachel sometimes was."

She bridled at that, just as Rachel used to. "You call it romantic because I can't explain it. If I could tell you

how the mandrakes did it I suppose it would no longer be romantic but practical. Well, I'm sorry I can't tell you how; all I know is that without the mandrakes it didn't happen and with them it did. Of course I'm like Rachel. It was enough for her to know that the mandrakes would do what she wanted, she wasn't interested in knowing how they would do it. You may think that's being romantic; I call it practical. Women are naturally practical; we have to be, with men as romantic as they are. Rachel was as practical as I am. After all we were sisters and more alike than you would think, with your eyes dazzled by that beauty which passes away and leaves us all the same. I know how practical Rachel was."

"And I suppose you call it practical for a woman to get pregnant against her husband's advice when she knows she is going on a long journey which will make it dangerous for her and difficult for him. And I suppose you call it romantic for her husband to advise her against it."

"Yes, Jacob, that's just what I call it. You think it's romantic for a woman to want a child so much that she'll risk her life to have it. I say it's natural. And I insist that what is natural is practical. And I say men are romantic because they try to thwart nature, to bend it to their own ends, to their designs and devices, and women are practical because they want only to serve nature. You would have been more practical had you realized that Rachel's having that child she wanted was a much more important business than the very fine but uncertain reason you had for making this journey, and you would have waited for her."

"But I didn't know, Leah! And when she told me, it was too late to turn back." Remorse wrung my heart. I

turned to look back at the tomb but it was by then far out of sight.

"Forgive me," said Leah. "I did not mean to chide you. Of course you did what seemed best according to your lights, but so did Rachel according to hers. So don't blame yourself or her. She was doing just what she wanted; and who is happier than one who is doing that? When we are serving nature we don't mind so much taking the consequences of our acts because we can truly say it is nature's fault, while you thoughtful men who carefully think out your own course, you take the responsibility and must blame yourselves if things go wrong. . . ."

I thought: It is no use complaining that women are unreasonable, that they avoid taking responsibility for the results of their acts. True they won't take the responsibility but they will face and bear the consequences, whatever they are, with heroic optimism, while we, being reasonable, want responsibility but are apt to break down and destroy ourselves when we have erred or failed. And the man who asks a woman to consider whether she ought to have a child or not is silly. Let him consider that venture all he likes. She will care for the child whenever it comes, no matter what happens.

". . . and we don't believe in too much farsightedness," said Leah. "You learned that from Rachel, didn't you? You can spend your whole life figuring what to do next and how to do it, taking all the precautions your brain dictates, but life is too short and too complicated to be dealt with that way, always with knowledge. It takes a God to do that. And just about the time you think you've got hold of some of God's knowledge he will strike you for your pains, to remind you that you are only a man."

"But it isn't always the creator who strikes us, Leah. It



is more often our own recklessness. And this recklessness which you say women prefer—and men like my brother Esau prefer it too—this recklessness unfortunately has its effects not only on those who practise it but on others. Not only is Rachel gone, but Benjamin is a frail and ill-born child.” I said nothing of the weary knocking of my heart that was keeping me sleepless in the nights, and which was not so much God’s reminder to me of my mortality but the effect of all the anxieties I had suffered on this journey, between the doings of my brother Esau and of Rachel, my lost love.

Leah looked at me with a determined air. “Listen, Jacob,” she said. “Rachel had no regrets for what she did. And she blamed neither you nor herself. And believe me, Jacob, I should have been happy to die like Rachel in giving you a son who will perhaps be another Jacob. Already his eyes look like yours, and the way his ears, small and pointed, lie flat against his head. I love little Benjamin and I shall find happiness in raising him up for you. I’ll fatten him and he will be as fair as Joseph, and as bright. You’ll see. And even if he doesn’t turn out a little Jacob but a little Esau to begin with, you can teach him your spirit. Don’t forget what I told you at Shechem: your new nation will have to be made from a lot of Esaus, they won’t all be born Jacobs like your Joseph. Too bad, though, they’re not. What a fine little mind that Joseph has! Already he knows all the letters of the alphabet and all the colors of the rainbow; and he names all the flowers he picks by the roadside, the daisy and buttercup, red and white clover, and black-eyed Susan and queen’s lace . . .”

And with her eyes alight with kindness, and happiness rounding her face, Leah was almost beautiful. I could see then how much Rachel, in ageing, would have come to

resemble her. I said, "You are a good woman, and you are very wise, Rachel."

Tears came to her eyes. She said, "You mean Leah."

"Yes," I said in confusion, "I meant Leah."

And she laughed then and patted my hand. Then she said, "Believe me, Jacob, I would cheerfully give all my wisdom for a tenth of that beauty my sister had, so that you might have come to me in the way you went to her."

Troubled to learn that she had missed anything in my way with her I looked at Leah then for the first time with understanding and compassion.

"But," she went on, "there is one consolation a homely woman has. She doesn't suffer the fears and irritations of the beautiful woman who, when she carries and bears children resents, even though she may not be aware of it, the man who is responsible for spoiling the beauty of her body; especially when she knows he is the kind of man to whom beauty is important and whose love may be entirely dependent on that beauty. That's why men are often happiest with homely women. Though you would have a hard time convincing one who hadn't tried it. Mostly they find that out for themselves after half a lifetime." She smiled slyly.

And it came to me then that a man may learn much more from a woman he does not love than from one he does. For with Rachel the knowledge of the truth I might have got was obscured by my passionate desire, my obstinate, foolish and wilful wish to have her remain that exciting entrancing vision I had first had of her at the well; but I listened to Leah now, eager only to know her as she was, to get from her the wisdom, the comfort, the peace she wanted to give me.

And as we rode together across the land Leah revealed

to me the spirit I had thought was not there merely because I had not wanted it, much as I had thought my brother Esau devoid of feeling because of my own sense of guilt for the hurt I had once done him. But now that I needed her spirit Leah discovered it to me and as we talked together I learned calmly from her many things which I should long since have perceived in my life with Rachel had I not then been too impassioned, and things I might have learned from my mother had I not then been too young: As that men who are thoughtful, careful and calculating, must sometimes be tricked by nature into doing its will. And since women are on the side of nature—nature's handmaids who need never be tricked into doing her bidding—it is women who serve to trick such men to that end.

"Even when a man is seducing a woman," said Leah, "he is not serving nature so much as his own desire. It is the woman who always bears the child."

And she holds him, I observed, by marriage, by law, if she can, to maintaining the child, which is all nature wants.

Leah laughed. "Your mind is so fertile, Jacob," she said. "Everything that drops into it germinates, sprouts and grows there."

But as we rode on together it became clear to me how—though the world we live in seems man-made—all nature is really female-ridden. You have only to look at the male insect tricked by the love of honey into fertilizing the female plant and then gathering his hoard under female domination. The very earth is female, which men must plough to make fruitful. And the odd thing about the female—to the thoughtful male, to the man of sensibility—is that though she herself has no use for our reason, our

logic, which to her seems unnatural, impractical, romantic, she admires the things we do with it, the discoveries, the inventions we make. In their reliance on the uncurbed dictates of their hearts, on intuition and expediency women are actually closer to the Esaus of this world; yet they prefer us, the Jacobs, because our thoughtfulness is for the future, and because of our concern for survival, which is nature's concern and therefore theirs, and which does not concern the Esaus who serve death more often than life. Whether women prefer us also when we are apt to be more like themselves in manner—gentler than the Esaus—it is not easy to decide, since there are times when they seem actually to want the brutal domination of an Esau. There were moments with Rachel when it seemed to me that what she really wanted of me, although she denied it, was a beating; something an Esau would have relished giving her but which was abhorrent to me. But as Rachel frankly admitted, women do not see the virtue in consistency which thoughtful men do. And how to deal with their inconsistency is a problem I cannot solve for you, my son. Each man of sensibility suffers it as best he can; just as he accepts the fact that the universe, whose order we are trying to discover and reveal with our consistent reason and logic, is complex to the point of anarchy.

Even Leah, wise, understanding, compatible and conciliatory as she was, would sometimes lapse into that irritating feminine inconsistency and irrationality. I discovered one day that she was not using on little Benjamin, as religiously as I had cautioned her to, the small truss I had so carefully contrived; I had to nag her into doing it.

"It is a great nuisance," she said, "and he will probably outgrow the weakness anyway. I'll put it on him, but you

worry too much about such things, Jacob. Everything can't be perfect."

"You talk just like Rachel," I said, irritated with her.

"But I am not Rachel," she said, turning on me with sudden and surprising resentment. "I am no more like Rachel than you are like the young man who came to us from Canaan. The Rachel you once loved is dead, Jacob. And something of that Jacob who loved her is gone too. And until you accept that definitely I don't think you will be able to live in peace with me or any other woman."

And she was right. I realized as she spoke how much the lost Rachel of my young dream was still fixed in the wishful recesses of my mind and heart. So much so that I had not yet been able to go to Leah as a man to his woman, although we had ridden together a long distance and talked so much.

"I think it would do you good," said Leah suddenly, "to ride back and have another look at the tomb. By the time you overtake us again I think you will see things differently."

How discerning she was! All the time, during those days we had ridden away from the tomb I had felt as if something tied taut to my heart were stretching, stretching painfully as the distance grew greater. It was as if I had not really buried the Rachel I loved, I had only lost her, left her behind me. I still feared sometimes that she was there waiting for me where I left her. So I turned and rode back to her swiftly and alone. . . .

But when I came to the tomb it was crowded. A crowd of women were gathered in the domed room by the roadside. Some knelt and prayed by the pillar I had raised to the memory of Rachel's slender and beautiful body. And

some stood by the stone and tossed upon it little folded pellets of paper on which they had written messages.

And I inquired of a woman, "Why are you gathered here? And what are these prayers and those pellets of paper?" And she told me that, having heard that Rachel who was once barren had been blessed with two sons and had given up her life in childbirth there on the road to Bethlehem, barren women now came to her tomb to petition Rachel to intercede for them with the creator of all life so that they too might become fertile. For it seemed to those women with their passion for fruitfulness that only one who had known both their bitter sorrow and the felicity they desired could properly intercede for them with an inscrutable creator.

And I saw then that two men were in the tomb and they were winding about the great stone lengths of red cord, which they then unwound. And I asked the men, "What is the purpose of that cord which you are winding and unwinding about the tomb of my young heart's desire?" And they told me that countless women, in cities too far distant for them to travel from, having heard of Rachel's release from barrenness, were willing to pay well for these lengths of red cord which had touched her tomb, and which they would wear, wound round their barren bellies in the hope that thus, with Rachel's miraculous help, they too might be filled with life.

And as I looked about me in the crowded tomb I saw then that the Rachel of my young heart's desire was indeed dead. She had become a myth; for me as for those wishful prayers. No more might I harbor her alone in my heart. Her beautiful body lay lost in the old earth and her memory belonged to this crowd of pathetic, of desperately importunate people praying for life, to the barren

ones wanting fruitfulness. And I was prompted to cry out to them, "My Rachel is dead! Why pray to the dead for life? And what is the good of this passion for procreation in a world where men are so troubled, so torn by doubt and conflict as they are in this one?"

But I refrained because I knew they would turn on me asking, "Where and how then shall we, the people who are afflicted, find life and fruitfulness and peace? Would you have us seek death? And in this world in which violent men make so much death and destruction, shall we not pray for fruitfulness? And if men like you with all your knowledge and reason and logic cannot yet order things otherwise shall we not resort to faith, however fantastic and unreasonable you may find it?"

And I knew I had yet much to study and to learn before I could gather the people together and help them to the good life they longed for. Yet I resolved there anew to work for their enlightenment, and with this urgent intention I turned from the tomb and rode back to rejoin my household on the way. And I rode swiftly with that determination in my heart, thinking how, because of woman, man is driven to achievement—either, as I was in the years before I got Rachel, to distinguish himself in her eyes, to make himself worthy of her, to win her; or, as I was in that time after you, my son, were born, when Rachel was making me unhappy, to appease himself for his disappointment in her; or, as I was then, riding from her tomb, to console himself for his loss of her. Yet, when I thought of the Rachel I had loved, it was as if I mourned no more the death of a woman—for she had been turned into a myth—but of something in myself, in each of us—the death of youth and its romantic beauty.

Upon my return, Leah brought me the baby, Benjamin,

and happily showed me that there was no longer any sign of the rupture even when he cried most lustily. She had kept the little truss on during my absence, she said; but she pointed out that I could not prove it was that which had cured the weakness or merely nature and time, or her good humor and faith; or her careful attention to his feeding and bathing which had changed him in those few weeks from a puling, scrofulous, premature infant, into a fat round smooth-skinned child, bright-eyed and crowing. And though her talk made no rational sense to me, Leah, looking proudly and fondly at the sweet babe in her arms, bloomed with the inherent and undying beauty of all womanhood. She became in that moment when she smiled to me over the child's curly head as lovely as ever Rachel was in the tender moments after I loved her, or as was my mother Rebekah, when she would say, long ago, that I had done something of which she approved.

Very much like Rebekah Leah sounded then as she said, "You feel better now, Jacob, don't you? And now that your heart is rid of distracting and feverish passion your head will be free for the great work you set out to do."

And Laban was right, I thought, when he said Rachel would be too distracting. For now that she was gone I knew how much my heart's desire had both driven and detained me on that road I took when I turned from Laban's world to return, to make in the land of my fathers a peaceful nation and a company of nations. I saw how with the final dissipation of that dream of passionate self-satisfaction the other vision I harbored for the good of all my kind became strong and vital. For with his passion man serves only himself and nature. It is with the wisdom of his spirit that he serves his fellow men. And this I per-



ceived because of Leah, and it was with her help that I was going back to take up the work of my grandfather, Abraham, who had taught God and men mercy. I would teach peace—I with the help of this woman, Leah, loyal and loving, who had brought me peace.

*...now the sons of Jacob were twelve...*

**B**ECAUSE she saw that the sight of him, crowing, kicking his fat round legs, flailing his dimpled arms upon his full-fed body, smiling at me with clear candid eyes that looked so flatteringly like my own—because she saw that it always cheered me, Leah would bring your baby brother, Benjamin, to me when I woke in the morning, or when toward evening I was weary. Always it would delight me to play with him a while, to let him hold my fingers in his warm fists, to make, to his delight, the sounds he made, to stare back into his round intently staring eyes, to watch the flicker of a smile or of questioning wonder play about the corners of his red-bowed lips or his gold-fringed eyelids.

I have told you of the pleasure I got from you, my son, in your infancy. Yet it is difficult for me to tell you just what is the special nature of that pleasure a man gets in looking at his own infant child. To be sure, a healthy and cheerful baby is always a charming creature, enchanting to look at. Yet the sight of no other baby will bring to a

man anything like the pleasure he gets from his own. The readiness of the smile that beams from its eyes and radiantly illumines its whole face; the instant gladness evoked at the sight of its father and the sound of his voice is a greeting the like of which a man gets from no one else on earth, except perhaps from his beloved in those rare times when love is fresh and untroubled. And, besides, in the delightfulness of his child he becomes aware of something of his own early life which has been lost to him. He recaptures, he recalls and relives that part of his life of which he has no memory, and thus becomes reconciled somehow to his ageing, even in a way to the ultimate and inevitable death, for instead of feeling cheated by time he feels enriched—that he has got all his full share. Indeed, time which year by year robs the childless man of his life, adds length to the life of him who sees the growing years of his son joined to his own. And he may look with pity upon the child who will have forgotten the pure happiness of those hours the father shares, those hours which the child will only recapture from the life of a child of his own, from the sight of his baby as he lies after the bath, pink and glowing, kicking his bowed legs, waving his arms with tight clenched hands, murmuring, cooing, crowing or shouting, trying the range of his new-found voice, his eyes smiling bright in the fresh light of the warm and pleasing world his parents have made for him; or as, turned on his belly, he strives to crawl toward something colorful in sight, his heavy head lifted with new and surprising strength . . .

Then only does the watchful father know what the dawn of his own life was like. And in the baby Benjamin I saw not only the unremembered part of myself recalled, but of you too, Joseph, despite all the difference there

was between you and your brother, even as infants. You too had been plump but not quite with Benjamin's sturdiness of limb; you too had been restless but not with his wild and rollicking abandon. His smile was radiant as yours had been, but there was not behind the bright playfulness of his eyes that look of something secretive I had early seen in yours, as of the inward growing spirit guarding its own peculiar destiny. And I was surprised to observe then how much of yourself at that age—less than three years before—I had already forgotten; although then, in my delighted watching of you I had thought that this or that new trick or trait of yours, this or that remarkable point in your progress I should never forget.

But memory is a fickle thing, and time is a subtle worker. Hearing Benjamin raise his still toneless voice upon first hearing Leah sing, and looking at you as you sang with her I could not recall when it was that you first began singing; just as looking at myself now in the glass I cannot really see myself as having ever looked any different, younger, although I know very well that once my hair was thick and my face unwrinkled, while now there are lines fixed around my eyes and mouth and my hair is not only thinning but greying. For inside me I feel so unchanged that when I hear someone refer to me as a man past middle age it is startling. I know I have grown older. But just when did it happen? On what day, in what week, month or year?

And when 'was it that time itself changed for me?—so that a year which in my youth had seemed so long and capacious a period is now a trifling span inadequate for a fraction of all I should like to accomplish in it. You, my child, have yet no sense of time at all. For you the day and night, the week, the month, the year, are insignificant

divisions of infinity. But the time will come when you will learn that life is not endless, that not only are your years numbered but that they get shorter as the end approaches, and you will begrudge yourself those long spells of slumber you now spend by night and even by day.

Seeing you and little Benny blissfully sleeping away the precious hours I would wonder sometimes how the mind of youth is freed from the dread implications of the passage of time. It is understandable that at twenty, to a youth who looks forward to his full threescore years and ten, fifty more years, half a century, seems a very long time since a year is as much as a twentieth of all he has lived; while to the man of sixty his remaining ten years seem very slight not merely because they are few but because each is but a sixtieth part of the life he has had. So that in youth we push those long precious days impatiently behind us (as I did during those seven years I waited for Rachel) as we reach for the so generously promising future; but in our later years we watch those brief irretrievable days flicker by with the growing sense of life's inadequacy.

Time beguiles us so that we do not see how it and we change from day to day. But one thing in us all remains unaltered, from that first day when, as naked and tender new creatures, we are pushed, spewed out of that quiet cave, the blood-warmed and blood-fed darkness and protection of the loving womb, into the cold, hard, noisy brightness of this unkind, unsafe world. With that first experience, at birth, I am now convinced, comes the sense of insecurity which, thus implanted early and deep in all of us, remains to be struggled with for life. So that whether, according to our different natures we, as Jacobs, go seeking with wisdom the love and approval of our fel-

lows, or, as Esau, we go seeking with violence their conquest and mastery, it is always to allay that profoundly rooted fear, and for our self-protection.

It was curious to see how early you, my child, revealed this profound human trait in your attitude toward your baby brother Benjamin. Before he arrived you had always, at sight of an infant, run to embrace it with delighted cries: "Oh! See the baby! See the pretty baby!" But with the advent of this one, this rival who got so much of the attention you alone had had, your jealous fear was aroused; your secure position as the beloved and protected one was menaced by this intruder who might take your place, might stand in your way. You would not look at him, although from the time he could see clearly, could distinguish faces and turn his head, he followed you about with fascinated eyes and a rapt adoring smile. When you were induced to come near and touch him he would gurgle with pleasure, but your tentative pat, unless watched, might turn to a sudden push or a wrench of his arm or leg. You might seize the rattle from his chubby fist. Or you might demand of Leah and me the attention he was getting, ask to be held, or to lie in his bed. Surely you had no real reason to think you would suffer any loss on his account, for Leah saw to it that you were as well fed and cared for as ever you had been. Yet you found, in your small child's heart, this fear that your brother endangered your existence, encroached on your domain; that he might—as I have suggested—supplant you.

To be sure, the loss of Rachel had affected you as much as it did me, despite your apparently easy acceptance of the change in your mother to Leah. It may have been accountable for the noticeable increase in your childish sensitivity and thoughtfulness. For a while I was seriously

concerned for your health; you got so very thin, and lost color; but Leah pointed out that you were growing fast and that such changes were to be expected. Nevertheless when I recall that you first showed signs of that change in the late months of Rachel's pregnancy with Benjamin, when your mother's preoccupation with the new life within her made her less attentive to you, I cannot help thinking that the disturbance you suffered then—although its signs were physical: the skin rash, the loss in appetite and weight—was deeply spiritual and not unlike what my spirit suffered because of the change in your mother toward me when you were coming. From a chubby playful child you turned then into a slender, high-strung and sensitive little boy who got suddenly and unaccountably sick. There were days when you lay lifeless, languid and pale, weakly, faintly humming your songs as we rode along and I prayed that no harm would come to you, and then as suddenly you revived, under our anxious care, to be your bright-eyed and mischievous self. But once, a few months after Benjamin arrived, and Rachel was gone, and Leah had succeeded in turning that puling unlovely infant into the rollicking round-faced cherub who delighted me, you suddenly woke one morning violently ill, vomiting wretchedly—all day and all night, until you lay haggard and sullen-eyed, with eyeballs rolling behind your drooping lids, and teeth grinding behind pale purple lips drooling gall.

Then you came round again to life with the aid of a physician who said, with the careful latitude of his calling, that it might have been something you ate or some excitement. I am inclined to believe now that it was the change in your mother and the associated advent of your brother; a double change which must indeed have deep-

ened that fundamental insecurity which displayed itself in your early animosity to little Benny, and which Leah and I did our best to allay, when your jealousy became obvious, by giving you as much attention as the baby, by inducing you to kiss him and play gently with him, by making you feel that there was love and room for you both in our world.

I do not mean to suggest that this sense of insecurity with which we are all afflicted at birth is necessarily an evil thing. As I have said, it manifests itself variously in us as we develop our different natures. In the violent and unscrupulous, like my brother Esau, it may indeed become an impulse to inconsiderate and cruel selfishness. But in the sensitive spirit of the man of good will it may become not merely the self-strengthening iron of his self-preservation but the very foundation and framework of his ambition and aspiration.

You, my son, will be, I am sure, one of these latter. And because you have beauty and thoughtfulness and sensitivity you will be envied, and suspect to those others. Because you will be ambitious and aspiring they will count you their enemy. For though all men are brothers in that they are moved by the same will to live and must share the common birthright of insecurity in this world it is the differences of their natures in the face of that universal insecurity which brings them into conflict. Already I see the jealous eyes of your brothers upon you—of the ten burly sons of Leah and Zilpah and Bilhah. It is not merely that they feel, as you did with little Benny, that you have come to take some of their share of this world. They know you are not one of their kind, and for this you are more to be feared. They are mostly of the brand of Esau, rude and thoughtless men of violence, and though they



are full grown it is as difficult to teach them as it was to teach you, a child, with Benny, that there is yet room for another on this earth, that the hand of every man need not be against his brother, that men may live in peaceful amity, helping and not hindering one another.

It will not be easy to teach this to the sons of Leah and Zilpah and Bilhah. They are ten, and you and Benjamin, the sons of the beloved Rachel, are but two, which is what you may frequently find to be the proportion of their kind to yours among men; and do not be discouraged, my son, even to find yourself alone, for your brother Benjamin, son of the wilful Rachel, may yet prove to be an Esau. He is still too young to reveal what his nature will be, but his differences from you are apparent. He has not that enthralling and perishable beauty of Rachel; and her loss has not influenced him at all. He is handsome but it is Leah who has reared him; he is practically her son. He is ruddier and more rugged than you. His face is more colorful, fleshier, less transparent. His thighs are not slenderly graceful but brawny and brown; his laugh is loud; and when I look at him, when I observe his delightful childish aggressiveness and the vigorous violence with which—shouting, “No, no, no!”—he opposes your attempts to take something from him, I am drawn by the sheer marvel of his vibrant health and spirits, much as my father must have been drawn by the enviable young animal strength of Esau. I am drawn to Benjamin by something other than what endears you to me—your spirit which is so much a fragment of my own.

For already it is your spirit which transcends your slender body, and it is plain to be seen what you will be, with your fine fair skin and your intelligent eyes illuminating your face that is translucent as if lighted from

within, not like the faces of your brothers, the lusty sons of Leah, which are like stone lighted from without. You, with your flowing words and your songs, your bright eager little brain with its quick grasp and vivid vision, will be of the company of those who study and think, and want wisdom and beauty, and express their hungers and their satisfactions in speech and writing. "This is like a lamp," you say of your mother's collander; and "these are little green snakes," you say of the long beans you help her shell, displaying the poet's observation. "This is a rose; that is a peony; and those are nasturtiums," you tell me in your sweetly precise voice as we walk in the garden, displaying your early sensibility for that knowledge which is power over nature and that naming which brings order out of its chaos. You will be not of those who do much business with their hard hands or loud voices, but of those who work with their brains in hours of stillness. As my father once said of one of these: *He will seek out the wisdom of all the ancients, and will be occupied with prophecies. He will keep the discourse of men of renown, and will enter into subtleties of parables. He will serve among great men, and appear before him that ruleth. He will travel in strange nations; for he hath tried good things and evil among men.*

But for all this you will have to struggle with your ruder brothers. You with your impatient insistence on perfection—even now in your play—will dream aspiring dreams and they will suspect and fear your dreams, though your dreams may be for their good, though your aspiration may be to help them; for might distrusts mind, however useful the brain may be, as I have well learned from my brother Esau. And yours will be a useful mind; even now your play is constructive and inquiring; you

build bridges and buildings, you carefully distinguish between a steeple and a chimney. And only yesterday you were delighted to learn that it is with your eyes you see, with your ears you hear, and your mouth you speak; and it was amusing to teach you by closing each in turn.

Because of your useful mind you may become great among your fellow men; but because of that difference which makes your kind often but two or even one among twelve you will be considered not as one of them but as an alien among them. You may at times regret this separation from your brothers and enviously wish you were more like them, as I used to envy my brother Esau when he leapt across the stream; but you will learn, as Laban put it, to take what you get in this world—to be what you are—to accept and for the most part cherish the inevitable destiny of the man of sensibility. So I have not hesitated to set you apart from your brothers by giving you a fine coat of many colors made especially for you, as I am offering you this weaving of my varied experience both for your enhancement and protection; this, although I know that in so doing I call the dangerous attention of your powerful brothers to your distinction.

But then life is precarious for all of us, and it is made no less dangerous for the man of sensibility by attempting to disguise himself for other than he is. Therein, it seems to me now, was my mother's error, the futility of my disguising myself as Esau, even if it did deceive my father. It certainly made Esau no less my enemy.

We Jacobs might as well be ourselves—quite openly. True, long ago, gentle Abel was killed by his violent brother Cain. But since then we gentler men have learned to save ourselves, with the potent aid of our women. Your great-grandmother Sarah sent Ishmael away into

the desert lest he do harm to his brother Isaac; my mother Rebekah sent me off, out of reach of the anger of my brother Esau; and I have told you how Rachel, your mother, protected me from the wrath of her own father, Laban. It may be that you will have no need for such womanly interventions; that, with your subtler brain you will scorn the service and protection offered you by a loving woman and will find your own way to survive, and will deal alone with the envious animosity of your brothers.

I say this not merely because of my faith in you, my son, but because it seems to me that in a sense the influence of women has been declining, has been getting less powerful—at least it is less apparent. In olden times they dealt not only with men but with God. The mother of us all did not fear to flout the command of the creator of the universe when she saw fit, and then she caused Adam to do likewise. My grandmother Sarah was somewhat more God-fearing, but she did not refrain from laughing at the Lord's suggestion that she become a mother at the advanced age of ninety; yet when that feat had been accomplished she got the help of the Almighty in persuading Abraham to drive away Hagar and her son Ishmael for the sake of my father, Isaac. My mother Rebekah apparently had no dealings with God; and she had to resort to deception to get what she wanted from my father for my sake. Nor did Rachel, my beloved wife, have any traffic with the creator; she helped me greatly, to be sure, by hiding those gods of her father, but they were but powerless idols of clay. And while I am not denying to dear Leah the good she has done for me and for you, my son—I hope indeed that I have here made clear how much we both are indebted to her—hers is the kind of undis-

tinguished service which men will always get impartially and will take, unaware, from women who love them. She has given it likewise to all your brothers. It has given you no special advantage. Perhaps this decline in the influence of women upon our acts is a hopeful indication that we have been needing that aid less and less as, growing more and more enlightened, we have been able to find our way toward our destinies with less help from those sweet meddlers in destiny.

And it is possible that, unaided, you will prove abler not only than your brothers but than your own father—that all of us will in time bow to the superior power of your mind and spirit. It is indeed my prayer that that be so. All I am hoping to do with this tale is to prepare you for that inevitable struggle in which you must prove yourself; so that you may rise from whatever pit into which your strong and jealous brothers may cast you—so that you will rise triumphant, not only to save yourself but to save them too from the consequences of their own unenlightenment and violence.

That, I believe, is your destiny, as unavoidable as was my own struggle with my brother Esau and his way of life when I arrived in Canaan.

*...and Jacob came unto Isaac his father...*

BY THE time I got there Esau had begun the building of a great nation, not in the way I had envisioned it to him, but according to his own lights. By appealing to the most violent of men, the kind who were discontented with peace, he had first gathered and organized a great army with which he was besieging town after town with the utmost ferocity. These, as they capitulated to his might, were incorporated into his growing empire, their surviving populations enslaved to the support of his armed forces and their further advances. Thus he had already taken most of Edom, and the whole land was filled with the dread of his relentless conquest. Some of his victims bravely resisted, but it was in vain because the only hope of success lay in counter-attack as furious and barbarous as his. For that sort of warfare they were not prepared; nor had they time to organize it, nor had they the spirit to prosecute it—for it meant not only the wanton destruction of armed men but the indiscriminate starvation and slaughter of innocent non-combatants, the women, the

children and the aged. So, by taking advantage of their reluctance to wage a murderous warfare, by terrorizing them with the displays of his ruthless might, and by the traitorous help of those individuals among them who were attracted by his promise of a chance to play the tyrant over their peace-loving fellows, Esau was rapidly turning the land into one vast prison whose inmates were enslaved—lived and worked primarily for the maintenance of their own tyrants and their warriors dedicated to further violent conquest and enslavement of others. His aim was to bring nation after nation into his dominion. The young sons of the conquered he took and trained in body and spirit for a warlike existence. And Esau, when I saw him again, proudly showed me how he had set many thousands of his subjects to work breeding the great herds of cattle required to feed his armies. Proudly he took me to see how his luckless serfs were engaged in applying those new principles of cattle-breeding and fodder-growing he had got from me. And I was appalled to see to what perverse ends my brother was putting my fine dream of a great nation and a company of nations, and my precious discoveries of the secrets of nature. In bitter disappointment I said to Esau, "But this is not at all my dream, Esau, this tyrannical gathering of men into a nation of slaves for the furtherance of violent conquest!" And my brother laughed.

"Of course," he said indulgently, "of course it isn't your dream, Jacob. And your dream will never be anything but a dream, because men can never be unified under anything but what you call tyranny. They must be harnessed. Give them freedom and the first thing you know they are working at sixes and sevens, and the next thing they are at each other's throats."

"But in time," I said, "they would learn to live and work together for their own good and the good of each other, for peaceful freedom instead of this beastly warfare to which you train them."

"Peace! You are always talking about peace," Esau answered. "*What peace is there between the hyena and the dog?* And men are no better. They want to fight. I set them fighting for something."

"For what?" I asked. "For a nation dedicated to nothing but conquest. That can come to no good end, Esau. *Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint.*"

"Not while I wield the power, Jacob," he boasted. "If there is to be any community of nations, it will be under my domination. The slightest resistance to my will is quickly crushed." And his cruel eyes reminded me that I too was in his power. But impatience and anger overcame my discretion.

"*Like the lust of a eunuch to deflower a virgin,*" I shouted at my brother, "*is the spirit of him who executes judgments with violence.* You are neither man nor beast, for every living creature loves his like. And you must love no one, no man or woman or child, or you could not wish to destroy your fellow creatures as you do."

Esau made an angry move as if to strike me, but thought better of it. "You and I have never seen things alike, Jacob: but for the sake of our father I am going to let you stay in Canaan. I'm not afraid of you, but you are of me. You are a conceited and ineffectual dreamer. For all your talk about love it is I who hunted venison and fed the old man while you were away pursuing your romantic and peaceful dreams. Still it would grieve him if I harmed you. And besides you have been useful to me; I must admit I've got some very good ideas



from you. So I'm going to move over to Mount Seir in Edom and let you have Canaan where you can play to your heart's content with your notion of a nation of free and peaceful men. I don't think you'll be too much of a menace here with my well-armed nations all around you. And I don't doubt but that most of your sons will see things my way in time. If you have any sense you will join up with me and move on toward Haran which you know so well. The house of Laban would make a rich haul. Anyway if you don't help me to Haran, Laban himself will be glad to, I'm sure."

I knew then that my dream of converting Esau to my vision had been foolish. My faith in the superiority of mind over might he would always see as conceit; his faith in might made him incapable of seeing ideas as effectual forces, except when backed by violence. I knew then as I know now that in our struggle with the Esaus as with the Labans we may expect no harm from them as long as we are useful to them and they have us in their power. We can work for and with them only so long as we do not question their ends. And their ends are not our ends. Esau, who used to ride the chaos he made with his might, had got from me the idea of a unified nation and the laws of cattle-breeding, but he was using them not to make the life of men more free, secure and peaceful, but to enslave men in a society organized and maintained to wage war on others and extend his power over them. Now he would let me live in Canaan because he might thus profit from any progress I made while he knew very well that, surrounding me with his forces, he could easily destroy me if I showed any resistance to him; and he could take from me, whenever he pleased, whatever I built up there. Thus, my son, will you find the Esaus from time to time per-

mitting the Jacobs, ever restless for progress and creation, to go their way unmolested, so that, for a while, our world appears to have fallen here and there under the influence of men of sensibility and good will, for periods in which we make some progress up the ladder of human aspiration. But it is then that the Jacobs must be most on their guard and most vigilant; for it is then that the greedy and jealous Esaus, without and within, are most apt to rise up or come to take over what has been created. For their dream is not for the future of mankind, but of their own immediate aggrandizement. And among men who seek only that, there can be no community and no true security. They remain selfish beasts, each fighting for his own survival. We, men of peace, must make a true community in this world in which all men may be secure. If we have to fight, let it be only for that.

Having set to work creating in Canaan a nation of people dedicated to peace and prosperity through the pursuit of the knowledge of the laws of creation I found my project complicated by the influx of fugitives, refugees from Esau's violent conquests; and it was disturbed by the plots of his disciples in our midst, of those among us who, seeing his success abroad, were tempted to emulate him, and went about preaching his violent policies.

I saw then that with the spirit of Esau against me I should in time have to fight Edom for the survival and freedom of Canaan, and I looked to our father Isaac with the hope that he might prevail upon Esau.

But when I came at last to Mamre in Canaan, to the house of my father, I found him a sick old man, wasted, weak and weary, who spent most of his days sitting alone in the sun trying to warm his bones, or walking slowly

on painfully swollen legs, trying to stir up his blood. When I spoke to him of my ambition to make a peaceful and perfect life among the people of Canaan and in time among all the nations, he said wearily, "My son, these aspirations of yours are not new. For ages men, in the midst of the unending strife of their leaders, have longed for peace. *And they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.* Such has been the dream of men of good will in times past, and such it will still be in times to come. I assure you that the older you get the more you will long for peace." The old man sighed. "But where is peace to be found on this earth? And as for your vision of making a better life among men by learning and wisdom, there is an ancient story which you should know: *And the whole earth was of one language and one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there. And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar. And they said, Go to, let us build us a city, and a tower, whose top may reach into heaven. . . .*"

I had difficulty interrupting my father to tell him that long ago my mother had told me the story of the Tower of Babel but in quite another connection—to explain man's failure to achieve divinity through speech.

"Every story of mankind," said my father, "has more than one meaning." He spoke with a little asperity, but continued more gently, "You who have lived with a woman you loved will understand my disagreeing with your mother on this point. And while your mother's in-

terpretation of that old story may have had some merit, I see another significance in it. You, like other men before you, are trying to build with knowledge a tower which will raise man to divinity. But I warn you—as this story does—that the Creator of our universe jealously guards his divinity, and there are limits to which man's ambitious aspirations will carry him. History records how, again and again, man's heaven-piercing towers have been struck down in confusion."

"But, Father, I have no wish to climb up into heaven. That is a childish ambition unworthy of mature men. To be sure, in my youth when I left home and journeyed for the first time over the earth on the way to Haran I dreamed of a ladder to heaven at whose top stood a God with whom I aspired to make, in the ignorance of the young, a bargain for my destiny. But I have lived, and learned better since then. And on my return from Haran there came a day when in my perplexity I saw that man must wrestle with his creator here on earth. And it is here on earth, Father, that it is my desire to create with the aid of my fellow men a heaven for all mankind. But see how my brother, Esau, and his followers are intent on making a hell . . ."

"Alas!" cried my father wearily. "I can see no more, and it is with difficulty that I hear you, my son. Is there no peace to be found on this earth? When I was harassed by the Philistines I gave way before them in place after place, because I wanted peace. I denied the impulse in me to strive with them, to enlighten their violent darkness. I took refuge for myself as on a sheltered island in the river of blood which the men of violence make. I am sick of this hatefulness, of this dreadful strife. All the living fear each other. There is no peace in any of

them. . . ." He closed his anguished eyes. He was blinder than ever, and he frequently said that his hearing was failing him too, especially when I tried to speak to him of my difficulty with Esau.

Toward the end of a man's life it is hard to tell from his behavior whether he is withdrawing from life or is being pushed out of it; but it was as if my father's spirit were withdrawing within the shell of his old body away from the troublesome doings of men. When he answered me it was always with sorrow or scorn for their ways. "It grieves me, Jacob," he said, "that there is dissension between my sons, and that men in these times are given over to evil destruction. Tell your brother that God said to Noah: *At the hand of man, even at the hand of every man's brother, will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.*"

"My brother Esau," I said, "is not concerned about our creator, nor does he fear the retribution of God, or of men, whose life he destroys or makes a slavish burden."

My father mused: *"Great travail is created for every man, and a heavy yoke is upon the sons of Adam, from the day of their coming forth from their mother's womb, until the day for their burial in the mother of all things. The expectation of things to come, and the day of death, trouble their thoughts, and cause fear of heart; from him that sitteth upon a throne of glory even unto him that is humbled in earth and ashes; from him that weareth purple and a crown even unto him that is clothed with a hempen frock. There is wrath, and jealousy, and trouble, and disquiet, and fear of death, and anger, and strife. And in the time of rest upon his bed his night sleep doth change his knowledge. A little or nothing is his resting,*

*and afterward in his sleep, as in a day of keeping watch, he is troubled in the vision of his heart, as one that hath escaped from the front of battle; in the very time of his deliverance he awaketh, and marvelleth that the fear is nought. It is thus with all flesh, from man to beast; and upon sinners sevenfold more. Death, and bloodshed, and strife, and sword, calamities, famine, tribulation, and the scourge: all these things were created for the wicked, and because of them came the Flood."*

"The wickedness of my brother Esau and his hosts," I said, "the hatefulness, the bloodshed they are causing, are more devastating than any Flood."

"The Lord said," replied my father, "*my spirit shall not strive with man forever.*"

"Does that mean then that all we can hope for is another Flood, in which the good will perish with the evil?"

"God said to our father Noah," answered my father, "*Neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of the flood: neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth.*"

"Then," I said, "it must mean that man will come in time to such perfection that he will not need God's striving. May we hope that? Shall I work to that end?" But my father, bemused by the poetry of his own sad thoughts, went on:

*But what is man?*

*And to what end does he serve?*

*What is his good?—and what his evil?*

*The number of his days at the most are a hundred years.*

*As a drop of water from the sea,*

*As a pebble from the sand,*

*So are his few years in the long day of eternity.*

He meditated a while on the beauty of what he had said:

*As a drop of water from the sea,  
As a pebble from the sand,*

he repeated, and then continued, "So do not cross your brother any more than you have to. Try to make peace with him, Jacob, and live out your days." Then he complained of the shortness of his breath and would say no more about Esau. He pleaded for peace. "My son," he begged, "*help thy father in his old age, and grieve him not so long as he lives.*"

It pleased him to know that I had prospered and had come back blessed with sons and much property. "All that has come to you from my blessing," he said with great satisfaction.

I said I was not unmindful of my good fortune, but I deplored the fact that a man needs must profit at the expense of another. I said that there was no good reason why all men could not be blessed, that when men had learned not to compete and war with one another for this world's goods but to work together peaceably and with wisdom for the good of all, then there would surely be enough for all, since with knowledge of the laws of creation man could get from nature in great abundance all that he needs. This I had myself proven in breeding those sheep I had got from Laban. Why then, I asked, should the blessings of this world be concentrated on a few favored ones? And it occurred to me as I spoke to my father that, had he thought as I did, had he not believed that all of the blessing must go to Esau, the elder, had he divided the blessing between us, my brother and I need not have been so divided in spirit and become enemies.

My father entertained no such thought. "Your mind was ever given to dreaming, Jacob. And I confess that in my youth I too entertained myself with such dreams. But I put them away from me as I came to see the hard realities of our world and of men as they are. And it was for this reason that I was inclined to think Esau should have my blessing, not only because he was the elder but because he was so realistic and so strong. My mind had never brought me anything but troublesome perceptions and impractical dreams. But now that you have been blessed, because of my blessing and your keen mind, take my advice: *To son and wife, to brother and friend, give not power over thee while thou livest; and give not thy goods to another, lest thou repent and make supplication for them again. Whilst thou yet livest, and breath is in thee, give not thyself over to anybody. For better it is that thy children should supplicate thee, than that thou shouldst look to the hand of thy sons. In all thy works keep the upper hand; bring not a stain on thine honour. In the day that thou endest the days of thy life, and in the time of death, distribute thine inheritance.*"

And recalling how I had once deceived him in his blindness my conscience troubled me.

When I asked if his sight was any better he said, *My eyes have failed from looking upward;* and still staring blindly toward the sky he went on,

*I have rolled up, like a weaver, my life,  
He will cut me off from the loom.*

When I brought him some delicacies he ate sparingly of them and put them aside to keep, complaining of trouble with his teeth. Then, swaying in his chair, as if



intoning a chant, he recited that poem the sadness of which my mother had once deplored:

*Or ever the evil days come,  
And the years draw nigh,  
When thou wilt say, I have no pleasure in them:*

*Or ever the sun,  
And the light,  
And the moon,  
And the stars,  
Be darkened,  
And the clouds return after the rain:*

*In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble  
And the strong men shall bow themselves,  
And the grinders cease because they are few,  
And those that look out of the windows be darkened,  
And the doors shall be shut in the street;  
When the sound of the grinding is low,  
And one shall rise up at the voice of a bird,  
And all the daughters of music shall be brought low;*

*Yea, they shall be afraid of that which is high,  
And terrors shall be in the way—*

There, though his voice was raised as if he had not yet come to the end, he suddenly stopped and I turned from his sightless eyes because I feared to see in my father's face the fear of what he had once presaged and was now come to pass; I turned from him remembering how courageous he had once made me feel with those proud words,

*Man sets an end to darkness,  
And searches out the farthest bound,  
The stones of thick darkness and of the shadow of death.*

I could not bear to see in my father's face fear of the shadow of death because it stirred in me anxieties for those presaging signs, those early intimations I had already got of that soundless and sightless sleep of the body's end: At a distance I could no longer distinguish forms and faces as sharply as I once did, the hearing of one ear, since a painful swelling had required a puncture of the eardrum, was somewhat impaired; and after moving a heavy weight or upon prolonged exertion my breath sometimes failed me and my heart beat loudly at an alarming rate. When I spoke to my father of these untoward signs he said, "For years I have gone to the physicians and for all their learned ministrations they have not saved me from the steady decay and inexorable advance toward death which is every man's fate. At best they can only stave it off a little. What then is the good of all this knowledge you extol, Jacob? Give me better the unwitting and unfailing strength of your brother Esau, than all this insight which reveals only the inconsequence of man in the face of nature. One after another men must lie down and die and are shovelled away into the dark earth."

Then leaning back on his pillow, he chanted:

O Death,  
How bitter is the remembrance of thee  
To a man that is at peace in his possessions,  
Unto the man that hath nothing to distract him,  
And hath prosperity in all things,  
And that still hath strength to receive meat!

O Death,  
Acceptable is thy sentence  
Unto a man that is needy, and that faileth in strength,  
That is in extreme old age,

*And is distracted about all things,  
And is perverse, and hath lost patience!*

*Fear not the sentence of Death:  
Remember them that have been before thee,  
And that come after.  
This is the sentence from the Lord over all flesh!  
And why dost thou refuse,  
When it is the good pleasure of the Most High?  
Whether it be ten or a hundred,  
Or a thousand years,  
There is no inquisition of life in the grave.*

In the presence of my father there was no dodging the consideration of death. He was losing the use of his limbs on one side and he no longer left his bed. Daily he grew feebler and dwelt more on the thought of death, but the nearer it approached the less fearful he seemed to be, the more calmly he considered it: *For to him that is joined with all the living there is hope—for a living dog is better than a dead lion—for the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward. For the memory of them is forgotten: as well their love as their hatred and their envy is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in anything that is done under the sun.*

*Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God hath already accepted thy works. Let thy garments be always white; and let not thy head lack ointment. Live joyfully with thy wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun—all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in life, and in thy labour wherein thou labourest under the sun. Whatsoever*

*thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest.*

After so long a speech his breath troubled him for a while, yet though I begged him to save his strength he went on as if fearful of not having time to say all he wished: *My son, let thy tears fall over the dead, and as one that suffereth grievously begin lamentation; and wind up his body according to his due, and neglect not his burial; make bitter weeping, and make passionate wailing, and let thy mourning be according to his desert, for one day or two, lest thou be evil spoken of:—and so be comforted for thy sorrow. For*

*Of sorrow cometh death;  
And sorrow of heart will bow down the strength.  
In calamity sorrow also remaineth;  
And the poor man's life is grievous to the heart.*

*Give not thy heart unto sorrow; put it away, remembering the last end; forget it not, for there is no returning again; him thou shalt not profit, and thou wilt hurt thyself. Remember the sentence upon him, for so also shall thine be: yesterday for me and today for thee. When the dead is at rest, let his remembrance rest; and be comforted for him, when his spirit departeth from him.*

One day when I came to him he said, "The death of Sarah, my mother, left me frightened and desolate. But I saw my father, Abraham, die, and I learned then that death itself is not painful or fearful; only life itself becomes too painful to be borne; yet do we fear the loss of that life. It is said that the Lord God said of Adam: *Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the*

*tree of life, and eat, and live forever: therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden; and I know now, my son, that in so doing God was merciful to man. For having achieved the sorrow and suffering which come with the knowledge of good and evil, man was saved by God from the endlessness of life which becomes so painful to the wise. And had Adam been older the Lord need not have feared he would eat of the tree of eternal life. An old man, having learned and suffered much, has no wish to live forever. He wants to go on living only for fear of death. O, would that God had not given us that fear of death! But then we should doubtless destroy ourselves before our time. I have come at times to feel nothing but sorrow for all the living, who must want to go on living their crowded and lonely lives, hopeful and disappointed, hateful and love-seeking, peace-loving, yet forever at war with one another. I have thought at times I could welcome death. And now I am in great pain; yet, for all my thought and talk, I fear to die. Hold my hand, Jacob, and comfort me."*

So I held firmly to his frail hand, dry and light as a withered leaf; but as I held to his hand I knew that man, like every other creature, dies alone. Though he die at home or in an alien place, surrounded by friends or enemies. The parting from those he loves can only sharpen the loneliness and deepen the darkness of that voyage, as the presence of hateful ones can only embitter it. Alone he arrives and alone he leaves this world. I held to his hand until he turned away his head and closed his eyes and fell into a deep sleep from which it was difficult to arouse him but from which he roused himself from time to time and spoke, disjointedly, rambling, in accents that became increasingly difficult to comprehend. Once he

said, "I am glad you have come home, Jacob, though it was a struggle. I said you would return. Remember? A man always returns to his father's house. But it is not easy, is it? You must suffer. You must wrestle to get back: *till thou return to the ground; for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return.* So we return to our father's house in the earth, which is also our mother; for is not our mother our father's house? Your mother said you would return to her. Remember? Men always return. But a woman leaves her father's house and does not return. She returns only to the fruitful earth, the womb of all living. And she does not long for the womb because she is the womb . . ."

Often he seemed to be trying to tell me something about the inwardness of death; he seemed to be struggling, as he used to when composing a poem, for words to express the inexpressible experience of dying, but words would fail him and his talk would break down into an unintelligible babel, which reminded me of my mother's remark: "He is trying to reach up to heaven with words." Thus he babbled until breath, too, failed him, and, exhausted with his effort, breathing raucously, he sank down again into deep sleep.

Esau was away on one of his forays and I slept in the room by my father to be with him in his last hours. Finally he wakened in the night and spoke with remarkable clarity as if all pain had left him. Fixing his blind eyes on me he talked as if he were telling me of a dream not he but someone else had had—a vision of long long ago:

*And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at eventide. And he lifted up his eyes and saw, and behold, there were camels coming. And Rebekah lifted up her eyes and when*

*she saw Isaac she lighted off the camel. And she said unto the servant, What man is this that walketh in the field to meet us? And the servant said, It is my master. And she took her veil and covered herself. And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. And Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah, his mother, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife and he loved her, and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death. . . .*

He struggled for breath and closed his wrinkled eyelids and great teardrops squeezed from under them and rolled along the furrows of his face as he talked. "But Rebekah is gone. Not for long did I keep that sweet vision I beheld in the field at eventide. Another took the place of your mother, a woman who was both a trial and a comfort to me; she bore my sons yet she deceived me. But she too is dead and I am alone, alone in the cold darkness." The old man sobbed like a child. "Mother!" he cried, "take me back into your warm sweet darkness. . . ." His voice trailed off into a murmurous childish plaint as he turned his grey head on the pillow and slept.

I wiped the sweat and tears from his face, wrinkled like a newborn babe's, and went out of doors to breathe the cool air of night under the dark starry dome of heaven. And I thought: Of all women only his mother remains constant in the memory of a man. Only his mother remains the ever gentle and loving woman he knew as a child, ever kind and tender, the woman he left to go out in the world to other women, for whose surprising inconstancy of character his mother has never prepared him. That her gentle and loving constancy to him are not so apparent to others—even to her husband—her son is seldom aware. I had heard how Sarah, my father's mother, had driven Hagar and her son, Ishmael, out of

Abraham's house. But that was for the sake of Isaac, so perhaps it may be truthfully said that woman will indeed be constant, not to her lover and husband, but only to her beloved son. Though I knew well how Rebekah, my mother, had deceived my father, it had been for my sake and was but further evidence of her constant love for me; it had not altered my vision of her. And you, my son, will always recall Rachel, your mother, as the tender and lovely woman we both have loved. It is not in malice that I have told you how inconstant was the spirit of that other Rachel, my wife. It is only that you may perhaps be better prepared for the inconstant spirits of those women you will in time come to love and who will come to comfort you in turn for the loss of your mother.

Indeed, it was that night as I stood under the great black star-studded sky outside my father's door that I resolved to set down for you that part of my story of which you could otherwise have no knowledge and which might serve your spirit in its own time. And that night, recalling how you, my son, had turned from the face of the mother you had lost as if to preserve unchanged your vision of her, and remembering how my father had cried out for his long-lost mother, I wondered whom I would call for in my last night, in that last lonely journey, that final passionate return to the dark womb of all creation. Shall I cry for Rachel or Rebekah?

There is, of course, no telling. For no man can speak with certainty of the day of his death, nor can he tell of the inwardness of dying any more than he can speak with certainty of his own birth or say what it is like to be born. But I have told you what I could, my son, of your own birth, and I am telling you now what I can of the death of my father.



When I returned to him he still lay as if asleep with his grey head turned to one side on the pillow which was wet where some tears had fallen. I bent to wipe his face but I saw then a new look of stillness, of aloneness, of infinite peace and calm, like that bland blank lifeless look on the face of an infant just out of the womb, of one not yet come to life; the look you had, my son, when you were born.

*...and Esau and Jacob, his sons, buried him...*

THIS morning, when I looked at the last words I had written yesterday, I saw that they were the same as the first words I wrote at the very beginning of this story; and I thought: This is the place to stop. I have come full circle around myself, I have tied the death of my father to the birth of my son. And as if to reinforce that observation and decision—as if to say that you are ready to take up the story and go on with your own—there, over my last words, were some scrawls and scribbles you had in an unguarded moment made in imitation of my writing, which you had been inquisitively observing. Indeed you have shown great interest in “the story Daddy is writing”; you have an idea of the relation between the written word and actuality; and among your scribbblings you have set down the first letters you have learned to write—the first letters of your name.

Yet I am prompted to go on a little further; perhaps because, despite death, the pattern of this life-story of ours is not a closed circle but an endless spiral, and I wish to

help you a little more on your way; perhaps because in going on with you I have the reassuring feeling that my own way is not yet ended. For seeing how easily men pass out of the lives of others, forgotten, we are apt to lose sight of the fact that life is a constantly flowing and self-cleansing stream. My father is gone and I still live. I will be gone and you will still live . . . Though just now you came running and flung your warm small arms around my neck and cried, "Joey wants to love Daddy."

And could you ask me now what is the purpose of this stream, constant, and self-renewing, I could yet give no better answer than that the purpose of this life is living. And any of the other ulterior and metaphysical reasons men advance sound to me like dodges to escape the responsibility for our failure to make this a good life, a failure which is not the fault of life itself but of man. The possibility of a better—if not a perfect—life is there and men have long seen it; but it is man with his greed and sloth, his stupidity, his stubbornness and violence, who seems to prevent his own progress to that end.

However that may be, of this much at least I am certain: man's primary concern should not be with his own birth nor with the death of his forefathers but with his relation in this life to his fellow men. And you, being what you are, will, I have said, inevitably have your brothers to contend with; and to that end I want to tell you what happened when my brother returned.

Esau arrived the day after our father died. He had over-run country after country, but had himself been badly wounded in one encounter and had been close to death. He was still haggard and pale, but, fresh from his bloody conquests, from fields and cities littered with the dead he had made, it seemed to me unlikely that he would be

touched by the death of that old man. To my surprise, however, at sight of the frail, grey body, my powerful brother sank down by the side of the bed, buried his stricken face and burst into loud and terrible weeping; his crying was like that of a great child torn between grief and fear.

It was shocking to see a man so strong and seemingly insensitive break down in such lamentation. And it was then I learned finally what I had once before suspected—that it is a mistake to assume that the rude and rugged have no sensibilities, as you will discover some day when your brothers come to you in distress. It was then I perceived clearly that men differ not in their ability to feel—in the lack or possession of a sensitivity to the precariousness of life—but in their means of its expression. Some, like my father, express it in poetry; others like myself in attempts to penetrate and master life's mystery with knowledge; others, like my brother Esau, in their fighting and violence express their inner fear and anguish. The many terrible deaths my brother dealt out to others did not move him because they made him feel strong against the insecurity of life from which we all suffer so profoundly. But confronted by the body of his father, whom he loved, he felt death as something suddenly and for the first time close to himself, inevitable, fearful and inescapable; while I, who had never brought death to any man, who had seen so little of death and had faced it with anguish and hateful resentment when it took from me the woman I had so dearly loved—I looked upon the calm childlike face of my father and, having found security with knowledge, knew that I was forever relieved of man's childish terror of death. So that now, looking at the door of my house, I

can think without a qualm of how some day, rigid, unseeing, unhearing, I shall be carried out through it never to return. At the sharp turn in the narrow stairs I have stood and speculated if they will have to set me up on end to get me out. . . .

Though I grieved for his going, it was as if, precisely because he was so close to me and I so much a part of him, I had somehow shared my father's experience and learned that death, though no living man should love it, was yet not something to be feared. It is not death, but the needless loss, the wanton destruction of life, that man should dread. And I was grateful to my father for this last lesson.

It may be that I was helped to this state of mind by a severe illness which overcame me shortly after the death of my father—an illness I now suspect was incurred by hidden fears, in which I suffered incessant disheartening anxieties, with spells of vertigo and spasms of pain, sometimes in the midst of the most commonplace acts; so that while planting seed or seedling in the garden or orchard I would wonder if I should see the flower or tree in the year to come. While saying good-night or in turning to glance at the sky I would have so sudden and terrifying a seizure that the thought would flash through my mind: You are doing this for the last time. So miserable was I, that a conflict arose in my breast between the wish to die and end my suffering and the wish to survive it and live. There were days when I should gladly have given up that privilege, and would willingly have left this world and all its works to you, my son. Nevertheless when Leah got me to rise by main strength from the bed to which I had succumbed weak and whimpering like a sick child, and I went down to the sea—two days in the sun and salt

air on the beach beside that blue and resounding expanse of water revived me so that I rose up like a lion, feeling that I should live forever; envying you, my child, the long life ahead of you, for all its suffering and disappointments; and thinking that when my time came I should have to be pushed down into my grave. Yet sometimes it seems to me that the time must surely come when death will seem like a welcome rest, a respite from this weary and imperfect world in which I have been so much a traveler—if not driven by others, then by myself—by the trouble I have made for myself with my aspirations since the day when I took upon myself the birthright of my brother.

But to return to my brother's behavior on the death of my father. It was shocking to see Esau's tears, to hear the cries of that man who was hitherto so unmoved by death, so certain of his survival that he had always looked forward to going into violent combat, with nothing but elation. I left him weeping unconsolably by the bed while I went to prepare for our father's burial.

I went out to the place which my grandfather Abraham had bought for himself and my grandmother Sarah; and there beside their graves was the grave of my mother Rebekah, which I had not yet visited. And the thought of her sweet body in the dark earth filled me again with such anguish as I had suffered at the loss of Rachel, and I wept there for them both.

Yet as I mourned for those two women I had most loved I knew then that in Leah, whom I had not loved, both Rebekah and Rachel were preserved for my sake; that in Leah, the true and faithful woman, lived the spirit of the long-lost mother of my childhood, and of that youthful ideal I had lost on the way back to Canaan. For

Leah, to whom I had gone as a man goes to a woman in his lustful youth after leaving his mother and before winning his heart's desire—Leah, in her goodness and loyalty to you, my son, and to little Benjamin, had taken the place of Rachel, had taken up all our lives where lovely Rachel left off. And whereas Rebekah and Rachel had each served me in one capacity and then gone from me, Leah had remained, turning from one role to another, and was now all women to me.

Not that Leah was more reliable in spirit than any other of the women I have known. Alas, I cannot say to you, my son, that a woman of constant spirit exists and that you should seek such a one. Faithful and loyal, devoted Leah was, but the nature of her spirit, its color and conviction, was as variable as that of every woman—changeable with the time of the month, and the season of her years, in a way, it seems to me, that no man's spirit ever is. For if a woman finds a difference in a man it is not usually because he has changed but because she did not really know and had only imagined his spirit. Once learned she can pretty much depend on it. Whether women, who generally get to know but one man in their lives, find in this constancy a limitation, I have no way of telling since, as I have already pointed out, women are secretive about such matters. But most men will admit that in women it is the changeability of temper to which a man finds it most difficult to adjust himself. But it is only when he has done so that a man truly knows a woman; then only is she real to him.

And beside the reality of Leah, Rachel had become a dream. After the passionate distractions of my life with Rachel, in whom I had seen and sought perfection, Leah, for all her imperfections, was like a welcome and peaceful

harbor. And I saw that what Leah was now, Rachel must have become in time—what all women become in time to the men who have loved them, who have pursued in them that exciting ephemeral dream, that seductive illusion of beauty upon which men fix themselves with such passion but which turns in their very arms into something else; turns with childbirth into something real, no longer of a dreamlike and fading but of a lasting beauty—that of the mother: first, of his children, and finally, of the man himself. So I saw that what had happened to me was what happens in effect to all men, that all wives suffer a death in childbearing and a change in their survival, a change so great that it is for every man like marriage to another woman. And that was what Leah had become to me, Leah who had once been to me like all those women the bodies of men go to before they come to the long-harbored ideal, the dream of beauty their spirits love. This, Leah had become to me, since the death in Rachel of that romantic and evanescent dream which was inevitably disturbed in your birth, my son, and was finally destroyed in the birth of Benjamin. And Leah had beauty now; not that beauty of the Rachel I found at the well in Haran and lost on the road to Canaan, but the beauty of Rebekah, the mother I was so loath to leave when she sent me on my way in search of that other beauty in which men seek not peace but excitement, saying, “. . . but you will not forget your mother, I have no fear. Men may forget their mothers for a while, and it is best they should; but there comes a time when they return to them.”

Yes, it is indeed so, I thought, as I stood by the grave of Rebekah, my mother. For even as men, forgetful of their mothers, enter with passion the wombs of the women



they love, they are indeed returning to their mothers, for do they not thus make mothers of their hearts' desires, and, in destroying their own exciting dreams of beauty, transform them into the peaceful motherhood they left behind with childhood? So do the wives of men come to resemble their mothers and thus themselves; and it is only in their children that traces are left and preserved of that evanescent beauty which men passionately marry and thus destroy. And thus it comes about that a man looking upon the mother of his children often wonders if he had not merely dreamed that he once married the exciting vision of his heart's desire; just as now when I look with peace upon Leah sometimes, I wonder if Rachel, her sister, ever existed other than in my dream; and only when I look at you, my child, can I be sure it was not merely my dream—that dream every man has of his heart's desire—which died there on the road to Canaan.

And sometimes now when I look at Leah, who, unromantic and undistracting, practical, fruitful and helpful, is such a comfort to me, I wonder if I have ever left my mother—so like Rebekah has Leah become, in her looks and her ways. No longer do I notice the homeliness of her eyes; they are so kind. Nor do I chafe at her occasional assumption of a captious and stubborn authority; she makes order and a good life for me in my household, not like the submissive bride Rachel but like the capable matron Rebekah, according to her own lights. She takes such good care of me, and is often so patient with me; even though she insists that I have trouble with my hearing only when I don't want to listen to what she is saying. And I pretend not to notice when she deceives me about matters she thinks are best for my children—especially for you, my son. How can I blame her for thinking your

future is far more important than any ideas, convictions, and aspirations I may have? And I think I know now just how Isaac, my father, felt in those days when I used to wonder why he so patiently stood for my mother's carryings-on.

And that day when I went to prepare to bury my father, after I had wept over my mother's grave, it was as if, because of Leah, Rebekah's grave had been emptied and I knew that so long as one woman exists who loves him, a man still has his mother, which is what all men, because of their profound insecurity, profoundly want. And I, as Laban told me, have been fortunate among men. And never since that day have I mourned for Rebekah, or for Rachel, whom I loved so much; and that is because of Leah whom I did not love when she first came to me. And that day by the grave of Rebekah I was grateful to Laban for Leah—as he said I would be, when he had deceived me.

So now, remembering how contemptuous I had been of Laban's counsel, I must warn you, my son, that you may come to see as wisdom much of what you may have read here with impatience or disbelief, although I must also warn you not to accept as wisdom all the counsel of your elders. How to determine what is and what is not wisdom, alas, I cannot tell you; even of what is in this tale. Then why tell it? you may justly ask. Well, you have seen me teaching little Benjamin to walk, setting him up against a wall and then tempting him, inviting him to move forward, to trust to my outstretched arms, to thrust himself out into space, to take those first steps. So you too were once taught. And this tale too is like a wall—the wall of the past, against which I have set you for support, and from which I now invite you to step

out into the future . . . despite those who say, it is no use: a child will learn in its own way and in its own time.

However that may be, when Esau came out to help me and we began digging the grave for our father beside that of our mother, I thought: More than any other death does the death of a parent shake one's youthful illusion of the endlessness of this life. You can hear of the death of a friend, a contemporary, with the feeling that you will certainly go on for a long, long time. But the death of your mother says, "No more, my child, can you return to that place you came from, that safe place you long for, the warm, wine-dark womb; in time you must go where we go, to the tomb." And the death of your father, though it tells you that you have supplanted him, also says, "But it is your turn next." That is why you, my child, would not look upon the lovely face of the mother you had lost and that is why I had not visited the grave of my beloved mother until it came time to bury my father beside her. And that is why, as I dug his grave, it was in a way, as if I were digging my own too.

And, as we dug, Esau confessed he was not himself because he too had been stricken with a severe illness as the result of his wound, the first serious illness of his life. Suddenly he asked, "Did my father suffer much in his dying?" It was not unlike the fearful question of a child about what is shrouded, hidden behind a dark curtain.

"No more, I think, than one frequently suffers in living," I said. "Dying, it seems, is not as difficult as we think, not as difficult as many things we endure and survive in life. Father tried at times to tell me what it was like but words failed him. I could not understand."

"Did he say nothing for me?"

"He said to tell you that God said to Noah: *At the*

*hand of every man's brother, will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man."*

Esau flushed and frowned, but he continued to shovel the earth from the grave as he sullenly said, "I have never met this God my father was always talking about, this creator of the universe who is said to have helped you so much. He has never done anything for me. What I have I've got for myself by my own power. Who is he to be passing judgment on me? Will he help me?"

"The creator of the universe," I said, "can aid only the man who learns the laws of his creation and abides by them."

"You know I never liked study, Jacob; and obedience is fine for the vanquished, but not for the likes of me." Esau spoke arrogantly, but an unwonted look of anxiety, almost of fear, was in his eyes as he leaned on his spade and said, "My father loved and obeyed God, yet God let my father die. If I bow down to him will he keep me from dying?"

I looked up over my brother's head at the birds flying blithely about, unmindful of the brief span of their lives; and wondered if a man ever could learn such contentment with what is vouchsafed him. I looked into my brother's fearful eyes as we stood face to face in the grave.

"You know very well, Esau, it is one of the laws of creation," I said, "that we must all die."

Esau's face fell. He spat on his hands. "I have no use for such a god," he said contemptuously, and resumed his digging. "I thought," he went on with a sneer, "that you with your smart brains and all the dealings you've had with your God might know how to get round him by

now, how to trick him into giving you anything you wanted. It looks to me like you're no better off than I am without him—not so well off, in fact, because any time I wish to I can take from you whatever you may get from him.”

I knew that now that our father was dead I need expect little consideration or mercy from my brother. He stopped digging and looked at me. “Will your God stop me, if you pray to him? And if I pray to him will he prevent someone stronger than me from coming to take what I've got?” He was breathing hard from his exertion. For the first time in my life I saw him look weary, worn. I thought: Esau is sick and anxious. And for the first time in my life I knew how my brother felt, and could truly sympathize with him. But the fear in his face and his voice seemed to me childish; like the infantile fear little Benjamin sometimes showed of what was unknown to him—the face of a stranger or a loud sudden sound.

I said, “There is unfortunately no telling what our creator will do, there is no foretelling your destiny, which is in his lawful hands, unless you know him better than we do, unless you know all his laws.”

Esau looked at once puzzled and hopeful, awestruck and incredulous. “All his laws? And do you really expect to learn that?” As always when I talked with my brother he made me feel at once a powerful sense of divinity within myself and the helplessness of all men in a divinely impersonal creation; he made me feel at once the essential difference between himself and me in our visions of the universe, and the essential brotherhood of all men in their common plight on this precarious earth. As I talked with my brother I knew that our enmity was eternal, yet I knew too that I need not destroy him, that the spirit of

Esau would in time destroy itself; that the Jacobs of this earth need only to go on striving to make the kind of a world I envisioned, a world of men dedicated not to the chaos of ignorance and hateful violence, but to wisdom which is order and loving peace; and Esau's kind in time must pass away from this world as have those monsters who are said to have roamed the earth in that fifth day of creation before God made man.

As we talked and dug, my brother continued to scoff at my vision of a world of omniscient and peaceful men, but not with quite his old assurance. Whether the weakness resulting from his recent wound or the sight of our dead father had softened him a little he went so far as to admit grudgingly that I had accomplished something rather remarkable in Canaan, and that it looked in fact as if he were carrying out our father's prediction that he would serve me; for some of his best men, tired of his endless warfare, were coming to Canaan to join with me. "But they'll soon get over that idea," he said contemptuously, tossing a spadeful of black earth skyward, "when they see they have no more ease and security in your little heaven than in the hell I raise—less, if anything."

"But Esau, don't you see that if it weren't for you and your hosts we would all have more ease and security? We would none of us have to work and worry for defense against each other, only against those natural hazards which life always offers, and even those would be infinitely lessened because we would all have time to learn their laws and take precautions against them. If you would only join us, Esau," I began, hoping again, in wrestling with his spirit, perhaps to persuade him; but he cut me short.

"That would be jolly now, wouldn't it? If I would

only lay down my arms, and give up all the power I've got. Then wouldn't my enemies have a fine time! Do you think I wouldn't like a little peace?" He stopped shoveling, and stood with his thick legs set wide apart. His sneering voice seemed to soften for a moment, but his eyes were hard as stones under his beetling bushy red brows. "No, Jacob, you had better give up that little dream right now. As long as my spirit lives you can count on it: you may make peace in your little party, within your own walls, but me you will have to fight—that is, if you get in my way."

From then on we dug side by side in silence until our father's grave was finished. And I and my brother Esau buried our father Isaac, in the earth, just as Isaac and his brother Ishmael buried their father Abraham in the earth, and just as you, Joseph, and your brothers will bury me, your father, in this same earth, since death, like life, is immortal. And as we laid our father in the grave I thought: My father's body is dead, but his troubled spirit lives on, divided between us, his sons. Then we filled up the grave, and Esau wept bitterly over that raw mound of earth while I stood and repeated the ancient wishful words my father had so often repeated: *Nation shall not lift up sword against nation . . .*

Then Esau turned away from me, and I have not seen his face since. I have heard indeed that he perished by the sword and is dead, but in his sons and followers his spirit still lives, and it is just as he said it would be. With the help of other men of good will I made in Canaan a nation dedicated to peaceful pursuits, to learning, to justice, to co-operation—to the freedom of the human spirit and the pursuit of human happiness. Because men differ as to what constitutes happiness, and because freedom permits

them to work either with or against each other, the realization of this dream has been no easier, no nearer perfection than the realization of any other dream I have had—of my dream of life with lovely Rachel, for example; and there have been times, I must confess, when in my impatience at the difficulty of getting my fellow men to adhere to the way of peaceful co-operation I have been tempted to resort to Esau's policy of tyranny, but to a good end; just as with Rachel I was sometimes prompted to his way of beating a woman into submission. But that was only in times of weariness, when there has been a wrestling in my soul between the love of freedom and the love of order, both of which the man of sensibility needs. As with the fractiousness of a woman I have learned to compromise, to be patient with the waywardness of men.

A constant difficulty in Canaan is that much of our energies must be diverted from our best pursuits to the unfruitful business of defense; we have had to fight for peace; for outside our walls the hosts of Esau have been a continual menace and even now their everlasting wars threaten to engulf us. And even within our walls I must ever be on guard against those Esaus—indeed among my own sons, like Simeon and Levi who dealt so violently with Shechem over Dinah—who, lacking a taste for the joys of peace, or weary of the self-discipline required by our way of life, are prompted to join forces with those violent and reckless ones who make a virtue of warfare, who ever insist that man is the natural enemy of man. And now word comes from Edom that there has risen on Mount Seir a leader, a man of violence, a tyrant more terrible than my brother ever was, who is intent on the



destruction, as he says, of the dreaming Jacobs and all their spiritual works.

These are not propitious times. These are times when a man crying out to others like a child for comfort is not answered by comforting words but by the cries of others distraught and fearful like himself. Nor does it help matters to be able to see quite clearly all the reasons for our present plight. In my youth I was blindly impatient with those who were unlike me. I hated the way of Esau; I despised the way of Laban. And now that I have come to see how each of us is driven by the same profound insecurity, I am no better off. In a conflict it is no help to know that your opponent is driven by the same thing that drives you. You must strive with him nevertheless. The hungry lion and the hungry serpent fighting over food are in much the same fix as are the Jacobs and Esaus striving, each in his way, for the needs of his own nature. So, though we continue to hope and work for peace, we Jacobs perforce must gird up our loins for hateful war so long as we are surrounded by the Esaus, and until we have achieved of our kind not merely one nation but a company of nations. It may be that men in flight from the slavish unity in which the violence and tyranny of the spirit of Esau binds them, will come to that free and peaceful unity of which I have dreamed. But I can yet give you nothing more certain than the promise I had in that youthful dream, when God said to me, *Thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth . . . and in thy seed shall all of the earth be blessed.*

Yet you, I am sure, will have no fear; you will not be deterred. You will surely have your own dreams to strengthen you, and you will stand in the pride of your spirit against the Esaus, though they are yet many and

you are few, though they may cast you down with their violence and imprison you in their darkness underground or in chains. However desperate his life, the spirit of the man of sensibility and good will must and shall survive his enemies because while they are for death and destruction he is for life and creation—and the purpose of life is life. You must see, now, that however aspiring, it is still a precarious, a dangerous destiny to which I here introduce you.

And here I must leave you, my son, because nothing I might now add to this story of my destiny would make yours any the less precarious; and because you have yourself come to the point where your own memory will serve you. Every day I am amazed at how observant you are, how much your little brain has already absorbed and stored up of what has come to pass in your own short time, of things I had already forgotten, like the sand box I made you in Haran, and the swing in the big tree, through whose great green-leaved branches you looked up at the blue sky, and white clouds sailing, and sharp-winged swallows circling the red chimney, and the "silver" horse on the weathervane of the barn back of our house. "And you set up a stone by the road; 'member?" you said yesterday in your sweet small voice. "That was Beth-el, Daddy, wasn't it?"

So now you, my son, can take up this story, finding in it your own meaning—since, as my father said, every story of man has more than one meaning—and adding to it from the store of your own memory for the good of the Jacobs among your own sons—for those men of sensibility and good will whom you will, with love, I trust, bring forth to take up in their turn this progress which is

our life and to which I here leave you without fear or regret. For when I think of you in times to come I see:

*Joseph is a fruitful bough,  
A fruitful bough by a fountain;  
His branches run over the wall.  
The archers have sorely grieved him,  
And shot at him, and persecuted him:  
But his bow abode in strength,  
And the arms of his hands were made strong,  
By the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob . . .*

















THE HAND is the hand of Irving Fineman, but the voice is the voice of all men of sensibility and good will. For in this self-portrait of "Jacob"—in his conflict with his violent brother and in his relations to others, his parents, his wives, his father-in-law—Mr. Fineman has presented not only one unforgettable character but the basic dilemma of man on this green earth from ancient times to the troubled present.

This Jacob is no hero. He is aspiring but he wants self-satisfaction; he wants to get on in the world and he wants to help his fellow-man. He wants peace, but he makes trouble for himself. As ambitious son, as passionate lover, as mature husband and father, he tells a frank story which is warmly human, timeless, happening every day.

Readers of *Doctor Addams*, remembering that remarkable young woman, Irene, will not be surprised to find in the women in this story—in Jacob's mother and the two women he married—a penetrating insight into the psychology of women, especially into the change marriage makes in a woman.

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